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That Ferguson Family

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

BY
HOWARD CHENERY

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NEW YORK
SAMUEL FRENCH
PUBLISHER
25 WEST 45TH STREET

LONDON
SAMUEL FRENCH, LTD.
26 SOUTHAMPTON STREET
STRAND, W.C.2

C42t

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Printed in the United States of America by
THE RICHMOND HILL RECORD, RICHMOND HILL, N. Y.

CHARACTERS

(In the order of their appearance)

MERTIE FERGUSON, *Character.*
FRED FERGUSON, *Character.*
TAVIE FERGUSON, *Lead.*
JOE FERGUSON, *Juvenile.*
RUPERT STRIKER, *Lead.*
LAURA CONNELLY, *Second Woman.*
BERT CONNELLY, *Second Man.*
MRS. SARAH THORNE, *Gen. Bus.*
BILL FLEMMING, *Gen. Bus.*
MARY FLEMMING, *Ingenue.*

(In addition, there is a messenger boy who does not appear.)

SCENE: *The living room at the Fergusons'. A city in the middle west.*

ACT I. *Evening, about* 8.30—*summer.*

ACT II. *The same—thirty minutes later.*
(The curtain will be lowered to denote a lapse of three hours.)

ACT III. *The same. The following evening.*

The following is a copy of program of the first performance of "THAT FERGUSON FAMILY," as produced at the Little Theatre, New York, N. Y., beginning Saturday evening, December 22, 1928:

GUSTAV BLUM

Presents

"THAT FERGUSON FAMILY"

A Comedy Drama in Three Acts

By HOWARD CHENERY

THE CAST

MERTIE FERGUSON ..... *Jean Adair*
FRED FERGUSON ..... *Halliam Bosworth*
TAVIE FERGUSON ..... *Merienne Francks*
JOE FERGUSON ..... *Alan Ward*
RUPERT STRIKER ..... *Arthur Kohl*
LAURA CONNELLY ..... *Rita Paige*
BERT CONNELLY ..... *Spencer Binyon*
MRS. SARAH THORNE ..... *Doro Matthews*
BILL FLEMMING ..... *George N. Price*
MARY FLEMMING ..... *Thelma Paige*

SCENE: *The Living Room at the Fergusons'. A City in the Middle West.*

ACT I. *Evening. About 8.30. Summer.*

ACT II. *The same. Thirty minutes later.*

ACT III. *The same. Late the following afternoon.*

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I feel a word should be said which will prove of value to the director and the actress playing the part of Mertie, the mother.

Mertie Ferguson is a very human being; one who provokes laughter and tears, and reflects life as it is often found in our present American home. She is not hard, brutal, or pointedly nagging. She is a plain woman who believes essentially in herself. She speaks firmly, and convincingly, the philosophy she feels is right. There is no cat-like quality about her. When she learns her daughter is a thief she does not break in a sentimental or highly emotional manner. The situation, she feels, is too much in her hands to do that. Don't feel that Mertie must have sympathy from the audience in Act II. She is getting it through the universal understanding which our American audience has for such a situation. She must command through to the end of the act. You will see where she begins to weaken in Act III—a sign of it is in the opening scene with Fleming. Then the scene with Fred. Later with Tavie—and at the end, when she is left in her empty house, alone.

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That Ferguson Family

ACT I

The entire action of the play takes place in the living room in the home of FRED FERGUSON. *This is an ordinary room of a very ordinary family. The furniture, quite out of fashion, in the modern home, shows years of constant yet careful use. Down Right is a door leading into the kitchen. Above this, next to the wall on the Right, is an old-fashioned sideboard with a high back and a large mirror. Upper Right is a double entrance leading into the dining room. Through the double doors can be seen a window looking onto the street. Above this double door and to the left is a door opening into the dining room. It is the entrance to an old-fashioned stairway leading to the floor above. A fireplace and mantel, built into the wall, is directly up center. Upper Left is a double arch leading into a hall and the front entrance to the house. Through this double arch can be seen a bracket hatrack next to the wall. In the center of the left wall is a large window, looking out on the street. Below this window, down Left, is a large table, convenient for the kind of study one would pursue in taking a correspondence course in civil engineering or*

architectural drawing. It is covered with books, drawings, and blue prints of various kinds. The usual instruments used for this work are also there. To the right of this table and facing it is a straight back chair. In the center of the room is an old-fashioned library table. It has a cover of ancient design. There is a rack of books, a few household magazines, and a small lamp. On either side of the table are two old-fashioned chairs. Down left Center, between the table, Center, and the desk Right, is a large Morris chair. Down Right Center, between the kitchen door and the table Center, is a low rocker, or sewing chair. There is a small sewing cabinet to the right of this chair. There is a telephone stand between the double doors into the dining-room and the mantel with a desk telephone on it. Above the mantel is a large mirror. On the mantel is an old-fashioned clock which has stopped. At the left of the mantel is an old bookcase. Pictures of an ancient design hang about the room. The paper is soft but drab, and not too inviting. However, it must not clash. On the sideboard is a lamp. There are wall brackets about the room. One is over the desk Down Left. A wall bracket is in the hall U.L.— *and one in the dining room Upper Right.*

The curtain rises on an empty stage. It is about seven o'clock of a mid-summer evening.

After a pause, MERTIE *comes downstairs, opening the door into the dining room* U.R. *She carries a soiled towel in her hand. She is dressed in a simple house dress of neat design and wears an apron. She is about to cross the arch through the dining room when she hears a noise of running water in the kitchen. She enters the room.*

MERTIE. Fred! *(There is a pause. She advances to door* D.R.*) Fred!*

FRED. *(Offstage* D.R.*)* Yes? What d'you want?

MERTIE. I can hear that water running out there.

FRED. I know it—I'm lettin' it.

MERTIE. It was running when I went upstairs, ten minutes ago. *(She moves toward arch* R.U.*)*

FRED. What if it was? It takes *ten minutes* for it to get cold.

MERTIE. *(Turning back and coming* D.R.*)* It'll never get cold this kind of weather if you let it run all night. *(She turns* U.R. *to dining room.)*

FRED. It's cold enough.

MERTIE. *(Turning back)* What?

FRED. I said it's cold enough! Good Lord, can't you hear anything?

MERTIE. Yes—when you talk so's people can understand you! *(She disappears into the dining room for a moment. Leaves her towel offstage and enters again, coming* D.R.*)* I put some fresh water there in the icebox. But you're just like all men—you never think to look.

FRED. I *got* my drink now—I don't need it.

MERTIE. Oh. *(Moving up to the clock on the mantel. She looks at it and turns away in disgust)* Well —stopped again! *(Coming down to the table* C., *above it)* Be sure and turn that light out when you come in.

FRED. What?

MERTIE. *(Raising her voice)* I said, turn out that light when you come in.

FRED. All right.

MERTIE. *(Moving* R.C.*)* And while you're out there, you'd better put Rex in the cellar, too. It'll save me having to do it before I go to bed.

FRED. All right, Mertie.

MERTIE. *(Going to the sideboard* R. *and starting to put some ironed things in the drawers which have*

been left on top of the sideboard) That dog is more trouble than he's worth. All he does is eat. I don't see why we keep him.

FRED. *(Offstage* R. *Whistles)* Rex—— *(Whistles)* Rex—here, Rex! *(Pause)* He ain't out here on the back porch, Mertie.

MERTIE. Maybe he's down the street, waiting for Joe.

FRED. *(Enter* D.R., *crossing to* C.*)* What? Ain't Joe home yet?

MERTIE. *(Turning sharply to him)* No—of course he ain't.

FRED. *(*U.C., *looking at his watch)* Well, he ought to be. It's after seven o'clock.

MERTIE. My Lord, Fred, are you losing your mind? Joe's been getting home late for the last two months. He keeps saying he has extra work to do.

FRED. *(Taking his pipe off the mantel)* Well, if he says so, I guess he has.

MERTIE. It don't take much to make you believe a thing, does it? Joe has been saying the same thing so much, you might know it ain't so.

FRED. Well, if he ain't working, what is he doing?

MERTIE. He's walking home nights with Mary Flemming—that's what he's doing!

FRED. *(Above table, lighting his pipe)* Seems funny that Joe would get girl-struck all of a sudden.

MERTIE. *(Taking a drawing pencil from the sideboard, crossing to desk* D.L.*)* Well, I can't say that he is—but he hasn't done a thing with the correspondence course he's taking. I think he's working for a prize or something. His desk has been littered with bridge designs lately. Just a lot of foolishness.

FRED. It's a wonder you haven't said something to him about it.

MERTIE. I *would* say something about it, but I ain't sure yet. *(Arranging magazines at table* C.*)* I

guess you'll never find out anything from Joe unless you ask him—and then you won't learn nothing. He's always so afraid somebody's going to *know* his *business.*

FRED. *(Sitting in Morris chair* L.C.*)* I don't blame him. Kids have got to have some things to themselves. Maybe you'd better let Joe alone for a while.

MERTIE. Why Joe, any more than anybody *else* in this family? It's my business to know! Of course I don't know whether it *is* that Mary Flemming he's going with, but last Sunday, in church, Mrs. Thorne was asking about him and her just like I knew all about it.

FRED. Sarah Thorne?

MERTIE. Yes.

FRED. That old buzzard! She never knows what she's talking about half the time, anyway.

MERTIE. *(Settling in a chair right of the table* C.*)* Well, you can leave it to her to find a thing out, just the same. She said she saw them together last week, and they were acting so silly she thought they were engaged. "It's too bad," she says. And I think so, too. Our Joe, at his age, getting crazy over a girl instead of trying to make something of himself.

FRED. *(Rising and crossing up to mantel for a match)* Well, I guess looking at a girl now and then won't hurt him any.

MERTIE. *(Her voice rising)* What good can it do him? Because you didn't get married until you was thirty ain't no sign Joe won't. There's more fools born today than there used to be.

FRED. *(Lighting his pipe)* Well, if my eyesight is any good, they've got more to *make* 'em foolish.

MERTIE. That's a lot of sense for you to be talking. I should think, Fred Ferguson, *one fool* in the family would be enough without adding more.

FRED. *(Crossing back to table* C.*)* Mertie, I don't like you calling our daughter, Laura, a fool.

MERTIE. What else *is* she? Getting married the way she did. Running away as if she didn't have a home to live in. It's enough to make parents lose their minds. And that, right on top of all we tried to do for her, too.

FRED. *(Crossing to Morris chair and sitting)* Oh, I guess we didn't do so much. We brought her into the world, and we gave her a home, but we didn't do much more.

MERTIE. *(Rising, crossing to front of table* C.*)* Maybe you didn't, but there's somebody else in this house besides you, Fred Ferguson, and don't you forget it.

FRED. Don't worry! I never will! *You'll* never give me the chance. But if I was you, Mertie, I wouldn't pry into Joe's business.

MERTIE. *(Moving around left to above table* C., *turning to* FRED*)* I don't want him running after a girl.

FRED. Why not? He could be doing things a whole lot worse.

MERTIE. Sure he could—but that's not the *point*, Fred. They're both kids.

FRED. That's all the more reason for you to keep a lot of your advice to yourself. If you say anything about it to Joe—he's like most kids—he'll do the very thing you tell him not to.

MERTIE. *(Crossing to sideboard for sewing basket)* Well, if you think I'm not going to look into this, you're mistaken.

FRED. *(Rising)* I'm telling you, Mertie, if you use your head you'll keep still.

MERTIE. You never knew me to be wrong, did you?

FRED. *(Looking at her)* Never! *(Turning toward window* L.*)* In your own mind.

MERTIE. *(Crossing above the table* C.*)* Joe's not going to make a fool of himself without me knowing it—you can mind that. *(Turning away to the* R.*)* Raising kids is too much of a job to let them go to pieces right when they could amount to something. *(Suddenly)* Did you get that stepladder I asked you to borrow from Morley's?

FRED. Yes. It's on the back porch.

MERTIE. You're not going to leave that stepladder on the back porch all night, are you?

FRED. Where else *would* I leave it?

MERTIE. Somebody'll steal it before morning. Watch what I tell you.

FRED. *(Crossing to* R. *to door* D.R.*)* All right. I'll bring it in.

MERTIE. *(To* R.C., *on* FRED'S *cross)* Don't forget that light while you're out there, either!

FRED. *(At door* D.R.*)* Mertie, for God's sake, keep still! *(Exit* D.R.*)*

MERTIE. *(Opening sewing basket)* I don't know what would happen to this place if I wasn't around here to look after things.

TAVIE. *(Offstage, upstairs)* Oh, Mom——!

MERTIE. *(Without turning)* Now what do *you* want?

TAVIE. Has Joe come home yet?

MERTIE. No, he hasn't!

TAVIE. What?

MERTIE. *(Up to stair door—opening it)* I said he hasn't!

TAVIE. What do you suppose is keeping him?

MERTIE. That's a foolish question to ask, Tavie—*you know!*

TAVIE. If I knew, Mom, I wouldn't ask you.

MERTIE. He don't do a thing with that correspondence course any more.

TAVIE. I guess he's too tired to do much with that now.

MERTIE. He ain't running after a girl, is he?

TAVIE. Maybe he is. Why don't you ask him?

MERTIE. Because he wouldn't tell me if he *was!*

TAVIE. What makes you think it's a girl?

MERTIE. Nothing makes me think so. I was just wondering—— *(The telephone rings.)* You hear that 'phone, Tavie? If it's that feller of yours, what'll I tell him?

TAVIE. You can tell him I'll be ready as soon as he gets here.

MERTIE. *(To 'phone)* You wouldn't be ready if he didn't come 'til ten o'clock. *(The 'phone rings again.)*

TAVIE. What——? What'd you say, Mom?

MERTIE. *(The 'phone in her hand, turning toward the stair door)* Keep still, will you? I'm answering the 'phone. *(In her sweetest manner)* Hello.—Yes, she's here.—She's upstairs, dressing.—Tell her what? Oh, I'm to tell her you'll be over this evening.—Wasn't she expecting you? She *was? (Hanging up in disgust—angry)* Then what'd you call up for?

TAVIE. What'd he want, Mom?

MERTIE. He wanted to tell you, if you was home, he'd come over. *(Moving* R. *to cabinet.)*

TAVIE. What did you say about me expecting him?

MERTIE. I didn't say anything.

TAVIE. Yes, you did—I heard you!

MERTIE. *(Trying to bring the subject to an end)* Well, if you heard me, what'd you want to know about it for?

TAVIE. I want to know *why* you asked him *why* I was expecting him?

MERTIE. *(Crossing to stair door again)* He asked me if you was *here*—just as if he didn't know it. When I told him you was, he told me to tell you that he was coming over. I thought you *knew* that, so I says, wasn't she expecting you? And he said, "Yes" —and I said, "Well, what'd you call up, then, for?"

TAVIE. Mom, if you don't stop insulting people—

MERTIE. Go easy, young lady! Your mother never insulted anybody that didn't need it, and if a blatherskite like him hasn't brains enough not to waste his time calling you up for foolishness like that, he ought to be insulted.

TAVIE. Why, what's the matter with Rupert?

MERTIE. Everything's the matter with him.

TAVIE. He's the nicest fellow I ever had, and you know it!

MERTIE. All of them are nice until you get them! Don't forget that, young lady. You've got a lot to learn before you start keeping a house. The trouble with you is, you'll never learn it. Now, hush up and finish your dressing, so you'll be ready when he gets here. (MERTIE *closes the door.* FRED *has entered* D.R. MERTIE *comes* D.R. *as he passes her to* C. *She looks out the kitchen door)* You forgot that light, Fred! (FRED *goes back into the kitchen.* MERTIE *picks up her sewing and settles in chair* R.C. FRED *comes in, crossing to mantel to look at clock.)*

FRED. That clock has *stopped again!*

MERTIE. *(Sitting in chair* R.C.*)* I told you it was a poor clock the day you bought it, but you wouldn't believe me. I guess you know it by this time.

FRED. It was guaranteed to last a lifetime.

MERTIE. Yes—thirty years ago.

FRED. Well, thirty *years* ain't a lifetime, is it?

MERTIE. It is for some people.

FRED. Huh! I guess it needs cleaning. *(Crossing to sideboard—looking for the newspaper)* Where's Tavie?

MERTIE. Upstairs! Daubing her face.

FRED. She's not going out again tonight, is she?

MERTIE. That feller of hers is coming again tonight, and if they don't go out they'll sit here and look daggers at us.

FRED. *(Crossing to table* C. *Back of it—still look-*

ing for paper) Who is it this time? That Rupert Striker?

MERTIE. I guess so. . . . What do you think of him?

FRED. *(Crossing to window-seat)* I ain't thought much about him, except that he's got a hell of a name.

MERTIE. It ain't the name that worries me, Fred. It's the man!

FRED. Well, I wouldn't fuss about it, Mertie. The girl's got a right to have somebody.

MERTIE. I suppose so. But did you ever look at him?

FRED. What would I want to be looking at *him* for?

MERTIE. Well, I'd want to be looking at him when things have gone as far as this has. It's begun to look like a steady thing!

FRED. *(Crossing to desk* D.L.*)* Nothing is ever sure these days until folks are married. And not even then!

MERTIE. You don't want our Tavie to get married yet, do you?

FRED. Why not? She's a woman, ain't she? *(Turning to* MERTIE—*slightly angry)* I've heard of worse things happening.

MERTIE. But that's not the *point!* It's *him!*

FRED. What's the matter with him?

MERTIE. He's always pretending he's so smart—and Tavie stands around looking at him like he was the President or something.

FRED. *(Looking for paper)* Well, I've seen worse looking chaps.

MERTIE. Oh, he isn't so bad looking—but he's so *proud* of it. You don't have to listen to him. If you did, he'd have you as crazy as a pup with a flea in its ear. I guess that's what's the matter with

Tavie. He's talked to her so much she's out of her head.

FRED. *(Crossing back to table* C.*)* Oh, well—— Where's the evening paper?

MERTIE. It's in the dining room. I thought you'd read it.

FRED. *(Patience gone) When* have I had *time* to read it?

MERTIE. You've had plenty of time. *You've* been home two hours.

FRED. *(Exiting out the arch* U.R.*)* Oh, what's the use?

MERTIE. *(Turning in her chair)* You'll find the paper in the rack. Now don't go pulling everything over. It's right on top.

FRED. All right—all right!

MERTIE. *(Pause)* Did you find it?

FRED. *(Entering, looking at paper)* Yes—it ain't all here.

MERTIE. It ought to be. Nobody's touched it. I guess what you want is there.

FRED. Huh! *(He crosses to chair* L. *of table* C. *and sits to read.)*

MERTIE. Well, I got them things washed out that Laura left. She'll be needing them when she gets home. *(Pause while she looks at* FRED*)* Oh, that makes me think! *(Goes to stair door—opens it)* Tavie—Tavie!

TAVIE. Calling me, Mom?

MERTIE. I washed that new pair of stockings of yours today.

TAVIE. All right, Mom.

MERTIE. Don't you take that pair that Laura left.

TAVIE. Oh—I won't.

MERTIE. I don't want none of Laura's things disturbed.

TAVIE. I ain't touching them, Mom.

MERTIE. What'd you say?

FRED. She says she ain't touching them.

MERTIE. *(Closing door and crossing behind table to* C.*)* I'll bet she is—I'll bet a cookie she is. She's never been able to keep her hands off anything yet. *(Picks up an empty candy box on the table* C.*)* Now look at that! That's what that fool, Rupert Striker, brings her every night he comes.

FRED. Well, what of it?

MERTIE. I guess he wants her sweet! There's candy boxes all over the house. I was going to burn them up the other day, but you know what she says. She says she wants to keep them for souvenirs. Can you imagine that? *(Crossing to chair* R.C.*—sitting)* Keeping candy boxes after she's eaten what's in them.

FRED. I didn't have any money to buy any when I was a kid.

MERTIE. You'd never brought me any if you had.

FRED. Maybe I would—I used to be pretty foolish! (MERTIE *glares at him.* FRED *chuckles.)*

MERTIE. There's never a piece left the next morning, either. They just sit here 'til two o'clock in the morning and eat candy.

FRED. Well, they've got to do something. They ain't got anything to talk about.

MERTIE. They have so! I was listening the other night, right from the foot of the stairs there, and I heard 'em. *(Biting her lips)* Oh, they've got something to talk about, all right. It's *love!*

FRED. *(Dropping his newspaper on his knee)* Love? In this day and age? My God!

MERTIE. That's what it is, Fred, for I heard 'em. That man has got as much love in him as a picture actor. I heard him say to Tavie: "My love for you is eternal!" The nut! I think our Tavie is gone on him, all right. You don't see her as much as I do, but every morning after he's been here she walks around like she had the blind staggers. I think any

minute she's going to run away and marry him, just like Laura did with Bert Connelly. I've had trouble enough with one daughter not to have any more. *(Pause. She sews.)* Fred. *(No answer.)* Fred!

FRED. *(Turning toward* MERTIE*)* What?

MERTIE. Have you thought where Laura and Bert are going to live when they get back from their honeymoon?

FRED. They'll live in a house of their own where they belong.

MERTIE. They won't if they ain't got one.

FRED. Well, I'm not going to start worrying over something I don't know anything about. When folks get married they got to take a chance.

MERTIE. I suppose you took a chance when you married me.

FRED. I'll say I did.

MERTIE. Well, Bert Connelly isn't taking any chances. Not with Laura. You know that as well as I do.

FRED. No, Laura is a good girl, and Bert is a lucky fellow to get her. We ought to feel just as lucky to get him.

MERTIE. I'm not so sure about that.

FRED. *(Solid and convincing)* But Laura has *married* him, Mertie. And she wouldn't have, unless she wanted to. If she is satisfied with him, I'm going to be.

MERTIE. Fred, that's not the *point!*

FRED. My God, Mertie! Has this got a point to it, too? Let me read this paper, will you?

MERTIE. Go ahead and read it. I don't want to talk to you, anyway—seeing you're so smart. Laura is going to live here with us.

FRED. What?

MERTIE. She's going to live in here with us. I got a letter from her today. They're visiting some of his folks in Peoria, and she said, "We'll be home to

stay early next week." She wrote the letter Saturday, so we can be expecting them any time.

FRED. But that don't mean they're going to live *here!*

MERTIE. What else *does* it mean? (TAVIE *is heard coming down stairs)* Sh! Here comes Tavie.

(TAVIE *enters room* U.R., *crossing to sideboard, looking for nail file. During the search the following conversation takes place)*

TAVIE. My curling iron is on the fritz again. Do you think you can fix it, Pop?

MERTIE. Did you bring it down with you?

TAVIE. No.

MERTIE. Well, how can he tell whether he can fix it unless he sees it?

FRED. *(Looking up)* What's the matter?

MERTIE. Tavie wants to know if you can fix her curling iron.

FRED. Now?

MERTIE. No—when you have time.

FRED. Oh—all right.

TAVIE. Have you seen anything of my nail file, Mom?

MERTIE. Isn't it on your dresser?

TAVIE. No, it isn't, Mom.

MERTIE. Then you'll have to look for it. I suppose you think I'm going to jump and hunt it for you. If you remembered where you leave your things, you wouldn't be losing them all the time.

TAVIE. *(Opening a drawer for a clean handkerchief)* I thought I did remember.

MERTIE. Now, don't look in that drawer for it. You know it's not in there.

TAVIE. I'm getting a clean handkerchief, Mom. Mine are all in the wash. *(Looking at her wrist*

watch, crossing to mantel to get it) What time is it, Pop? This old clock has stopped again.

FRED. *(Consulting watch)* Eight o'clock.

TAVIE. *(Busy with her watch, not listening)* Hm! What?

MERTIE. Tavie, I wish you would try and listen to what folks say to you. He said it's eight o'clock. *(There is a pause while* TAVIE *goes to the mirror over the mantel and fusses with her hair.* MERTIE *twists around in her chair to see her)* You're going to drop dead some day looking at that face of yours. Come here and let me see how you look.

TAVIE. Just a minute, Mom——

MERTIE. *(As* TAVIE *comes down her* L.*)* That's a nice dress, Tavie. Is that the one you said you were going to make?

TAVIE. No, Mom, it isn't.

MERTIE. Looks real pretty on you. Pull it down a little on this side. There—clothes always did look well on you, Tavie. You ought to be a model or something. *(During the above,* FRED'S *attention has been called to his pipe. He goes to the mantel, but there is no tobacco. He starts for the hall* U.L. *and gets his hat.* MERTIE *sees him)* Now where are you going?

FRED. What's the matter? Can't anybody move out of this house without answering a lot of questions? I'm going after some tobacco.

MERTIE. *(Rising—crossing to arch* U.L.*)* Well, don't be gone long. I don't want to sit here alone all night. And keep an eye out for Rex while you're out and bring him home if you see him.

FRED. All right. *(He exits* U.L. *Slam door.)*

TAVIE. *(Who has crossed to above table* C. *Sees empty candy box)* There's that candy box. I never saw such a house! Mom, I don't see why you don't—

MERTIE. *(Turning on her quickly in the arch, coming* D.L.C.*)* Don't start that now, Tavie. Your

mother has been working all day, and she's tired. If there's any picking up to do before that feller of yours gets here, you'd better do it, and not be talking.

TAVIE. *(Picking up the newspaper and folding it)* All right, Mom——

MERTIE. It seems to me you'd think of your mother once in a while, instead of always worrying about yourself. Ever since you've met that feller you've been working so hard to laud him you've been acting like a fool! (TAVIE *tosses her head and takes the candy box to the sideboard.)* Take it from your mother, Tavie—it ain't worth it!

TAVIE. *(Turning to* MERTIE*)* Who are you talking about? Rupert Striker?

MERTIE. *(Coming* C. *Above table)* Who else *would* I be talking about? It's none of my business that you have company, but when you have it, don't act so silly about it.

TAVIE. *(Crossing* D.R.C.*)* Would you call Laura silly because she ran away and married Bert Connelly?

MERTIE. She must have been or she wouldn't have done it.

TAVIE. *(Crossing in front of the table and sitting on arm of Morris chair* L.C., *polishing her nails with buffer)* I don't think she was silly, Mom. I think she loved him.

MERTIE. Yes, she was full of love—just like you are! But we'll have to pay for her foolishness. Watch what I tell you!

TAVIE. I'd like to know what we've got to do with it.

MERTIE. You'll find out what we've got to do with it when they move in.

TAVIE. That's nonsense, Mom. They won't be living *here!*

MERTIE. Who says they won't?

TAVIE. Bert wouldn't think of such a thing.

MERTIE. What's Bert got to say about it when he hasn't got anything to say it with?

TAVIE. You're only borrowing trouble. Laura married Bert because she loves him, and he loves her, and——

MERTIE. What's love got to do with the price of a ton of coal, I'd like to know?

TAVIE. Oh, a ton of coal isn't everything in the world.

MERTIE. It's a lot more than Bert Connelly has got—or that fellow you're traveling with. I always gave Laura credit for having a lot of sense, Tavie, but she fooled me. I've got just you and Joe to look after now, and I don't want either one of you to be following in her footsteps. *(Soft, sincere)* It's the mistakes in life we make, Tavie, that causes all the trouble, and marriage is one of the mistakes you can't very well undo, once the job is done. You're making a decent living. Stick to it for a while. Get the nonsense out of your head, and then you'll know whether you want a family on your hands or not. Raising a family, and raising them *right*, is a job. I *know* because I've been through it. Nobody wants their children to make mistakes, Tavie—for it's just them things that make the last years of their life—*hard!* (TAVIE *listens in silence. She is thinking seriously about herself, her situation.)*

TAVIE. *(Rising, crossing in front of table, putting buffer on sideboard)* I don't know what you're talking about!

MERTIE. I'm talking about the things children do that reflect upon the bringing up their parents gave them.

TAVIE. *(Turning to* MERTIE, R.C.*)* You don't think Laura——

MERTIE. No, of course not, Tavie, but just the same, last Sunday in church every eye was looking a hole right through me. Maybe Laura didn't mean

any harm in running away to get married, but it's the looks of the thing the parents have got to live down —not the fools that do it!

TAVIE. But if Laura is happy, Mom——

MERTIE. Tavie, that's not the *point!* I'd as soon have a daughter of mine *steal* as do a thing like she did!

TAVIE. *(She flinches—collects herself)* Steal?

(The front door closes with a loud bang. MERTIE *turns toward door* U.L.*)*

MERTIE. Is that you, Joe?

JOE. *(Entering, hanging up hat)* Yes, it's me.

MERTIE. Why don't you knock the house down when you come in?

JOE. That old door needs fixing, Mom. You have to slam it to close it.

MERTIE. Did you bring Rex home with you?

JOE. No, I haven't even seen him.

MERTIE. I'll bet he's been run over by an automobile and killed or something. You'd better go right out and look for him before it gets too dark.

JOE. Don't worry about him, Mom. He can take care of himself. Did I get a letter today?

MERTIE. You mean from them people you said you was writing to?

JOE. Yes.

MERTIE. Well, there wasn't anything in the mail for you today. Have you had your supper?

JOE. *(Crossing* D.L. *to desk)* No, not yet.

MERTIE. I'll get you something right away. *(Crossing to door* R.*)*

TAVIE. Do you want me to help you?

MERTIE. No, you've got too much on your mind. (JOE *sits* R. *of desk.)* Now, don't be setting down there, Joe, until you've had your supper. Get your-

self washed. It won't take me a minute. (MERTIE *exits* D.R.)

JOE. *(Taking up blue prints)* Where's Pop?

TAVIE. *(Crossing above table* C.*)* He went out after some tobacco.

JOE. *(Looking at* TAVIE *as she crosses* D.L.C.*)* That's another new dress, ain't it, Tavie? What you doing—springing something tonight?

TAVIE. I'm glad you noticed it. It's the first time you ever did.

JOE. *(Looking at his blue prints)* Well, I try not to notice things around here, Tavie. But a flash like that—who wouldn't? Going out?

TAVIE. Yes.

JOE. Soon?

TAVIE. As soon as Rupert gets here, of course. Don't be a dumbbell.

JOE. Oh, you're going out with him again, are you?

TAVIE. *(Angry)* Yes, I'm going out with him. Have you any objections?

JOE. Now don't rear up, Sis.

TAVIE. I'm not—but I can tell by the way you act that you don't like him.

JOE. Well, he's not my idea of a permanent fixture.

TAVIE. *(Crossing below table* C.*)* Who ever gave you the idea he was going to be?

JOE. *(Straightening up in his chair and looking squarely at* TAVIE.*)* You're not going to all that trouble for nothing, are you?

TAVIE. What do you mean—trouble?

JOE. *(With a gesture)* That—the scenery! That's bait for a meal ticket or I'm cuckoo!

TAVIE. Joe, what's the matter with you?

JOE. Tavie, if I threw the dough into the duds the way you do, I'd have to smoke twenty-five cent cigars to look the part. How do you do it?

TAVIE. I use my head.

JOE. Laura wasn't able to do it.

TAVIE. *(Crossing to sideboard)* Laura didn't know how to manage.

JOE. But you do, eh? The gifted child!

TAVIE. *(A step to him—angry)* Well, she didn't!

JOE. Don't get too much *charged,* Tavie. Some day you may have to pay for it. If there's one thing husbands don't like it's their bride's accounts.

TAVIE. Smarty!

JOE. Oh, that's all right, Tavie—I'm thinking of getting married myself.

TAVIE. *(Crossing* L. *to him)* I thought there was something the matter with you. Who to?

JOE. Oh—somebody who's been smiling at me.

TAVIE. *(Sitting on* L. *arm of Morris chair,* L.C.*)* Who is it, Joe—Mary Flemming?

JOE. Sis—you're a good guesser.

TAVIE. *(Confidentially)* Mom was asking about it tonight.

JOE. About Mary and me?

TAVIE. Yes.

JOE. Well, what about it?

TAVIE. She wanted to know if it was Mary that was keeping you from coming home to your supper nights. Is it?

JOE. Yes. Can't a fellow go see a girl if he wants to? He's got to start some time.

TAVIE. I heard her talking to Pop, too——

JOE. Oh, that's nothing. Mom's just *got* to talk about something. It's a wonder to me she hasn't lit into us about Laura. Pretty tough on us, Sis. We're the only two left to get ragged now.

TAVIE. Oh, Laura isn't gone. She's only married. Mom says they're coming here to live.

JOE. Not here!

TAVIE. That's what she says.

JOE. Mom's crazy! What'd they get married for?

TAVIE. She got a letter from Laura. They'll both be here most any time.

JOE. That'll be sweet—having them here!

TAVIE. Mom says they haven't any other place to live except here with us.

JOE. Rot! There's empty flats all over town.

TAVIE. Yes, but Mom says Bert hasn't got anything.

JOE. He'll find something soon enough when he gets tuned in on the broadcasting.

TAVIE. You mean Mom's talk.

JOE. *(Rising, crossing* C.*)* Yes. You see, Tavie, we're used to it. It'll be different with Bert. It seems as if all I've ever heard in my life is Mom's talk. Whatever I do, or wherever I go—I can hear Mom—finding fault about something. *(He turns* L., *back to* TAVIE*)* She'll find fault with Bert just as she has with us. Nothing is ever really right—and nothing is ever going to be. Gee, Tavie—there ought to be something better in life than just—this!

TAVIE. You're not going away, are you, Joe?

JOE. I can't make up my mind—— Laura went!

TAVIE. But she got married.

JOE. Yes—and no wonder. I want to get away, too, Tavie. I've got to—I've just got to!

TAVIE. Mom wouldn't like it if you went. You know that, don't you?

JOE. Mom doesn't like anything, Tavie. She never had a good word for Bert, but Laura took him just the same. She won't like Mary, either.

TAVIE. Have you asked her to *marry* you, Joe?

JOE. No—but almost. I used to think I had backbone for most anything, but when I'm around Mary I lose my nerve.

MERTIE. *(Offstage* D.R.*)* Joe!

JOE. Yes?

MERTIE. If you want your supper while it's hot, you'd better come and get it.

JOE. I'll be right out.

MERTIE. You haven't washed your face yet, have you?

JOE. *(Crossing* D.R.*)* I'll do it out there.

MERTIE. Then you'd better come along. (MERTIE *enters* D.R. JOE *exits.)* You'll find everything right on the table. *(To* TAVIE*)* Hasn't he come yet?

TAVIE. *(Sitting* L. *of table, looking at a magazine on table* C.*)* Who?

MERTIE. That feller of yours. Seems to me he'd be getting here if he intends to go home before morning.

TAVIE. He has to come on the street car, Mom—and make a change. It takes a long time if you don't make good connections.

MERTIE. *(Taking up her sewing)* Don't he own one of them automobiles?

TAVIE. You haven't heard of him owning one, have you?

MERTIE. *(Sitting* R.C.*)* Well, he talked the other night like he owned one, or was going to.

TAVIE. I think he will own one some day, Mom.

MERTIE. If he didn't feed you so much candy all the time, maybe he *would* own one.

TAVIE. Oh, Mom, don't talk so foolish.

MERTIE. That ain't foolish, Tavie—it's sense. You can always tell a fool of a man when you see him walking around with a candy box under his arm.

TAVIE. I never saw a girl that didn't like it.

MERTIE. Well, maybe not—but liking it and *having* it are two different things! You must think, if a feller can feed you candy, he'll be able to feed you with whatever else you want the rest of your life!

TAVIE. I shouldn't wonder but what he could, Mom.

MERTIE. That's the kind that never can! And it's

girls, the likes of you, who haven't got head enough to see it.

TAVIE. Well, don't think it's worrying me any, because it isn't.

MERTIE. *(Rising, crossing to sideboard for thread)* No—the only thing that's worrying you is whether you're going to get him or not.

TAVIE. *(Crossing to Morris chair* L.C.*)* Oh, Mom——

MERTIE. Rupert Striker is a nut! Remember you haven't only got to look at him—you've got to listen to him—and there's nothing quite as disgusting as a windbag of a man!

TAVIE. *(Angry)* Who says he's a windbag?

MERTIE. Everybody.

TAVIE. Why, nobody in this house even *knows* him!

MERTIE. Nobody *has* to know him. All you've got to do is look at him—and listen to him——

TAVIE. He isn't any worse than Bert Connelly!

MERTIE. What Laura did has already been done, Tavie, and can't be cured.

TAVIE. They'll get along somehow.

MERTIE. That's what they all say—but they get along by coming to live with their folks.

TAVIE. You might be glad to have them some day, Mom. Bert makes a good living.

MERTIE. Yes, he's another one that's always talking about automobiles, and a home along the boulevard—but you don't see him owning one, do you? It'd just be like him to buy one of them automobiles before he got himself a house to live in—— *(Crossing to kitchen door* D.R.*)* You got everything you want, Joe?

JOE. Yes.

MERTIE. Put that butter and milk in the icebox when you're finished. I'll take care of the rest of the things myself.

JOE. All right, Mom.

(The doorbell rings sharply five times.)

MERTIE. There—that's him, Tavie! He rings that doorbell like a policeman!

TAVIE. *(At the mantel, fixing her hair)* Keep still, Mom—he'll hear you.

MERTIE. That won't hurt him any!

TAVIE. But it's the looks of the thing. *(Crossing to door* U.L. *and exiting.)*

MERTIE. *(Taking up sewing)* Now don't stand out there in the hall and talk a half hour before you come in.

JOE. *(Off* R.*)* Who's at the door, Mom?

MERTIE. *(Rushing to door* D.R.*)* Don't yell, Joe. It's that feller of Tavie's. He'll hear you.

JOE. Oh, God! (MERTIE *sits* R.C.*)*

TAVIE. *(Offstage* U.L.*)* Hello, Rupert. Come in.

RUPERT. *(Offstage)* How are you, Sweetheart? I thought I'd never make it.

TAVIE. What was the matter?

RUPERT. Too many flat wheels on the street cars, Tavie. They jump the track.

TAVIE. *(Laughing)* They do ride pretty rough. *(Enter, followed by* RUPERT *carrying hat and box of candy)* Come in here. Mom, here's Rupert. (TAVIE *on* RUPERT'S L.*)*

RUPERT. Good evening, Mrs. Ferguson. How's the ruler of the roost this evening? *(Crossing down above table* C.*)*

MERTIE. *(Glancing up)* Pretty well, I guess.

RUPERT. That's the way to feel. Improving each shining hour, I see.

MERTIE. Someone has to be doing something useful around here, and my eyes are so bad I can't see to read after dark.

RUPERT. That's what I've always said. The eyes

will go with the passing years, but we mustn't get discouraged.

MERTIE. No, I suppose not.

RUPERT. When the time comes for me to wear glasses, I'll sign off and close the station.

MERTIE. *(Giving him a dark glance)* You ain't got long to live, maybe.

RUPERT. I beg your pardon?

MERTIE. Most everybody has to wear glasses some time in their life.

RUPERT. Not in our family. Grandpa didn't, and he lived to be ninety-two.

MERTIE. Second childhood!

RUPERT. A sturdy man, nevertheless, Mrs. Ferguson. A sturdy man!

TAVIE. *(On* RUPERT'S L.*)* Let me take your hat, Rupert?

RUPERT. *(As he hands it to her)* Catch the lid, Tavie? A famous B & J.

TAVIE. It's a nice one.

RUPERT. None better for double the money, if you ask me. Walk up a flat for half the price and save your change for a rainy day. Ever hear of a B & J store, Tavie? It's an idea I thought of years ago, but never had the capital to swing.

TAVIE. *(Going to rack in the hall)* I'll hang it out here in the hall.

RUPERT. Park it where you like—wear it where you will. The man who wears a B & J can always fill the bill. *(Laughs.* TAVIE *laughs with him.)* Compliments of the evening, Tavie. *(Holding out the box of candy to her)* All wrapped up, and another soul made happy.

TAVIE. *(Taking the candy)* You thoughtful creature!

MERTIE. *(Raising her eyes to heaven)* More candy! My God!

RUPERT. *(L.C.)* They're a new kind.

TAVIE. *(At table* C., *opening box)* Are they?

RUPERT. I wouldn't kid you. A nickel a shot, and the third number off the raffle board. That Greek lost a lot of money on this deal if you ask me. He almost fainted.

TAVIE. *(Laughing, crossing to* MERTIE *and offering the candy)* Have one, Mom?

MERTIE. It looks so pretty, Tavie, I don't like to spoil it.

RUPERT. The opportunity of a lifetime. He who hesitates is lost, you know. It only cost a nickel, anyway.

MERTIE. Well, I'll take this one. *(*TAVIE *takes a chocolate and passes to* RUPERT. MERTIE *nibbles a bit)* My! They're rich, ain't they? Most too sweet for my stomach.

TAVIE. Why, they are not, Mom—I think they're lovely!

RUPERT. They're just like the girl I bought 'em for, Tavie.

TAVIE. *(Laughs)* Oh, you! *(Crossing to* MERTIE*)* Have another, Mom.

MERTIE. No, thanks—they make my hands sticky.

RUPERT. *(Crossing* D.L.C.*)* They are pretty rich —but that's what makes them good!

MERTIE. It must cost you a lot of money for candy. . . . I declare, this house is littered with candy boxes.

TAVIE. Now, Mom——

RUPERT. *Cost* is a mere trifle in my life, Mrs. F.

MERTIE. It looks like it. Buying so much candy is nonsense! It's a wonder to me you haven't bought one of them automobiles!

RUPERT. Just the subject I was about to mention!

TAVIE. *(Delighted. Crossing to* RUPERT L.C.*)* Oh, Rupert! You haven't bought one, have you?

RUPERT. It's waxing near the hour, Tavie, but I

THAT FERGUSON FAMILY

Act I, Page 7

can't make up my mind. Lots of fine limousines on the market, you know!

MERTIE. You ain't thinking of buying a limousine, are you?

RUPERT. *(Crossing* U.C. *above table)* Just giving one of those new Auburn eights the double-O—that's all. There's a mean chariot, Tavie, if you ask me. A few dollars down, and you save carfare while you pay for it. A monument to American engineering. Any color you want, and the upholstering is optional. A combination of comfort and durability which lends a new meaning to the automobile industry. A car which spells success for the successful business man.

MERTIE. You don't think you're anything like that, do you?

RUPERT. Like what?

MERTIE. A business man?

TAVIE. *(In chair* L. *of table* C.*)* What difference does that make?

MERTIE. No difference as long as he doesn't buy one.

RUPERT. Now, Mother, one can't ride the electrics all the days of his life.

MERTIE. One can if one has to. There's a lot of young people that would be better off without them than with them, from what I can see.

RUPERT. Are you looking at me, Mother?

MERTIE. Well, I'm not looking at the Statue of Liberty.

RUPERT. Check, Mrs. F.! Check! I agree with you. *But*—and here's the little secret. I'm about to say, "Transfer, please" for the last time. Things are breaking for me, Tavie—*things* are *breaking* for *me*—and when they do, I'll break with them.

MERTIE. You go buying automobiles and you *will* be broke.

RUPERT. Remember the Salvation Army, Mrs. F. "A man maye be down, but he's never out."

MERTIE. Most men are *out* before they ever get started.

RUPERT. *(Crossing to her)* There's where you're wrong, Mother. And if you don't know *why,* I'll tell you.

MERTIE. I don't want to hear it.

RUPERT. *(Quickly)* Then I'll tell Tavie——

MERTIE. She won't know what you're talking about after you've told her.

RUPERT. *(Turning to her)* I beg your pardon—

TAVIE. Don't mind Mom, Rupert. She's only talking.

MERTIE. Well, I try to say something.

RUPERT. *(Center above table)* That's right, Mother—that's right. And you usually do.

TAVIE. What were you going to tell Mom, Rupert?

RUPERT. Oh, yes.—It strikes me, Tavie, that old stuff about "Opportunity knocking at your door but once" is the draft from the hot-air flue. Opportunity is always knocking at the door——

MERTIE. Most people live in tents and can't hear it, I guess.

RUPERT. No tent for mine, Mother. I'm going to have a door with a brass knocker on it.

MERTIE. You'll need it.

RUPERT. Just last week I was in conference with the head of our firm. It didn't take me five minutes to open his eyes. Believe me, Tavie, when little old Rupert gets next to the mahogany furniture, he sells his stuff. You know what I told him?

TAVIE. No—what?

RUPERT. I guess I'd better tell you what I didn't tell him. It won't take so long. That bunch of pencil-pushers down there are going to wonder who I am before many more Zeppelins cross the briny.

TAVIE. Are they going to raise you, Rupert?

RUPERT. Raise me? Say, I'm going to slide off the high stool into the swivel chair before the week is out.

TAVIE. Oh, no, Rupert? Really?

RUPERT. I saw it coming, Tavie—I saw it coming, or I'd left them long ago. Say, Tavie, are we stepping out this evening?

MERTIE. It's pretty late to be going any place, isn't it?

RUPERT. *(Showing her his watch)* The shank of the evening, Mrs. F.—the shank of the evening. Where's Joe?

TAVIE. In the kitchen, eating his supper. He got home late tonight.

RUPERT. *(Crossing to door* D.R.*)* Absorbing a little life-giving ingredient, eh? Ease yourself into a coat, Tavie, while I wander out here and take a drink on the city. *(At the door)* Good evening, Joe. How's the correspondence shark this evening?

JOE. *(Offstage)* Not so forty!

RUPERT. (TAVIE *back of table* C.*)* Stay with it, my boy—stay with it. No man ever drove his car from the rear seat unless he earned the privilege, and when they short-change you on natural ability, you've got to catch them with something else when they're not looking. (RUPERT *has passed out of the picture* D.R.*)*

MERTIE. *(Watching him off)* The nut! What's he talking about? Do you know?

TAVIE. Of course. Because you don't understand him is no sign nobody else does.

MERTIE. He's got more conversation than a fool politician—and just as much sense. I should think you could see it. The trouble is, you don't try.

TAVIE. *(Fixing her hair at the mantel)* Well, I mind my own business, and that's a lot more than some others are doing.

MERTIE. Minding your own business won't get you any place. Some day you'll find it out.

TAVIE. Well, I wish people would keep their nose out of mine.

MERTIE. Who do you mean by people?

TAVIE. *(Crossing to her,* R.C.*)* Pop—and Joe—and *you,* Mom. What do you know about Rupert's business?

MERTIE. I don't know anything about it. He hasn't got any business to know anything about!

TAVIE. *(Going to sideboard)* He has, too, Mom—he says so!

MERTIE. He says so! But that don't make it true. If you listened to him, you'd think he was president of a company.

TAVIE. *(Crossing to door* D.R. *Opening it)* He will be if he isn't now.

RUPERT. *(Offstage)* And you know what I said to him?

JOE. No—what?

RUPERT. Well, I'll tell you——

MERTIE. Now he's shooting off his hot air on Joe.

TAVIE. *(Closing door* D.R.*)* Sh! He'll hear you, Mom—— *(Opening door to listen again.)*

RUPERT. *(Offstage)* Yes, sir! It knocked the Old Boy lower than the French franc. And when I talked to the Vice-President about it—say!——

MERTIE. Will you come away from that door, Tavie?

TAVIE. *(Closing door)* But I want to hear.

MERTIE. Don't be listening to the fool, I tell you. The way you follow him around and take in his gas, I believe you'd marry him blindfolded.

TAVIE. *(Crossing* C. *below table)* Well, what if I did?

MERTIE. If he ever asks you to marry him, don't you do it, for he won't know what he's asking when

he asks it. He sizzles around like a skyrocket without a tailpiece. A lot of fuss, but no direction.

JOE. *(As he and* RUPERT *enter.* TAVIE *to* L.C.*)* You'll be a big man some day, Rupert.

RUPERT. (JOE *to desk* D.L. RUPERT *to* TAVIE L.C.*)* You don't have to tell me, Joe. You don't have to tell me. I'm the guy that slaps them on the back and makes them like it. Where's the cute little bonnet, Tavie?

TAVIE. I don't think I'll wear one, Rupert.

RUPERT. We're going down to Tom's place for a little while. You'd better come too, Joe. We'll wait for you.

JOE. *(Turning from his work in chair)* I wonder if I'd better.

RUPERT. A great evening to whet the shin! I'll 'phone the other nine-tenths while you tangle yourself in the ultra.

JOE. Oh, I don't know whether I ought to——

RUPERT. *(Crossing to* JOE*—slapping him on back)* Think, Joe—think of the lady, my boy. Slip me the number, Sweetheart. It's the one chance of a large evening.

JOE. What do you think, Tavie?

TAVIE. Oh, Joe—come on—go!

RUPERT. *(Crossing to 'phone* U.R.*)* Sure. What's that number?

JOE. *(Following to* C. *below mantel)* 6178 Brice.

RUPERT. That's the ticket!

JOE. When she answers, Rupert, you tell her——

RUPERT. Leave it to me, Kid—leave it to me. The only reason I'm not Secretary of State is because I never asked for the job. Hello, Central. 6178 Brice. The very digits, Sweetheart—and *may* you be successful!

TAVIE. Hurry and get dressed, Joe——

JOE. Wait a minute. Maybe she isn't there.

RUPERT. Hello—Mary? Rupert Striker of the Lombard Manufacturing Company. We're all going down to Tom's place for a little shin scuffle. Yes, Joe's coming. He's upstairs dressing. He asked me to call you. *(Calling loudly)* You almost ready, Joe? *(In the 'phone)* He says he's almost ready. You want to talk to him? He says he can't come. *(Laughs)* You can tell him that when you see him! Bye-bye! We'll see you in half an hour. *(Hangs up. Drops down* C., *above table)* There you are, Joe. The light of your life says "yes."

JOE. *(Dashing for stair door)* Great! *(Exit.)*

MERTIE. Put on that plain white shirt, Joe, because it's the only one with all the buttons on.

JOE. All right, Mom——

MERTIE. Seems to me, all he does is tear the buttons off his shirts.

RUPERT. There you are, Mother—Joe needs a wife. Someone to look after him.

FRED. *(Entering through hall* U.L.*)* Well, Mertie —they've come!

TAVIE. Who, Pop?

FRED. Laura and Bert!

MERTIE. *(Rising)* My Lord! Have you seen 'em, Fred?

FRED. They're right outside, Mertie. *(General confusion.)*

MERTIE. Quick, Tavie—straighten up that sideboard. I'll fix this table. Rupert, be useful for once in your life and take this newspaper into the kitchen. The idea of their coming and not letting us know anything about it. (RUPERT *exits* R.D. TAVIE R.C.*)*

FRED. *(*L.C.*)* Now, Mertie, don't get excited.

MERTIE. *(*C. *Above table)* Where are they? Why don't they come in?

FRED. *(*L.C.*)* They're getting their stuff out of the car.

MERTIE. He ain't bought one of them automobiles, has he?

FRED. *(Crossing to window* U.L.*)* It looks like it.

MERTIE. *(To* TAVIE, R.C.*)* There, Tavie—what'd I tell you!

TAVIE. *(As* RUPERT *enters* D.R.*)* Oh, Rupert—Pop says they've got an automobile.

RUPERT. Is that so? The installment business gets another new customer, eh? Say, maybe we can borrow it for the party tonight.

MERTIE. Don't you dare. You'll be killing somebody.

RUPERT. No harm in asking, is there?

TAVIE. Oh, Rupert—will you?

RUPERT. Leave it to me, Tavie—leave it to me. *(Crossing to window below table)* What kind is it? A Packard?

TAVIE. *(To* MERTIE C.*)* Oh, Mom—isn't it wonderful!

MERTIE. Tavie! Please!

RUPERT. I can see it from here. Getting ready for a family, I'll say. It's a five-passenger.

MERTIE. Tavie, for God's sake, get him out of here. He makes me so nervous I don't know what I'm doing.

RUPERT. *(Crossing to her* C.*)* A little control now, Mrs. F.—a little control. Make the homecoming a happy one! Twilight—a moment of suspense —and she folds the blushing bride to her motherly bosom. The movies have nothing on us. Too bad we can't camera this——

MERTIE. Oh, will you shut up!

RUPERT. Ah, ah, ah, ah! Be broad-minded, now, Mother—be broad-minded. Remember the old saying, "When chickens come home to roost——" *(Turns up to window with* FRED.*)*

MERTIE. Oh! *(There is a pause as* LAURA *appears in the door.)*

LAURA. Hello, Mom——

MERTIE. What are you standing there for, Laura? Come in. You act as if you were afraid of something.

LAURA. *(Unable to keep back her tears, going to her mother* C.*)* Oh—Mom——

MERTIE. *(Taking* LAURA *crudely in her arms)* What's the matter, Laura? You're all right, ain't you?

LAURA. Yes, Mom—I'm all right—but——

MERTIE. Land sakes—there ain't nothing to cry about, is there?

LAURA. I can't help it——

MERTIE. I suppose it *is* sort of natural. I cried myself when I got married. You'll get over that—once you get used to it.

LAURA. *(Crossing to* TAVIE R.C.—*Kiss)* Hello, Tavie.

TAVIE. Oh, Laura—and you're married. Aren't you happy?

LAURA. *(Brushing away her tears)* I'm the happiest girl in the world. I don't know what's the matter with me. I guess it's as Mom says—it's natural—

TAVIE. Well, if I was married, I bet I wouldn't cry about it.

(BERT *enters, pausing with luggage in arch* U.L.)

MERTIE. Keep still, Tavie. Of course she's happy, or she wouldn't be crying. *(Sees* BERT*)* Hello, Bert.

BERT. How are you, Mother? I'm going to kiss you.

MERTIE. It won't make much difference. *(Crossing to her* L.*)*

BERT. *(A healthy hug and kiss)* Then here goes for luck.

MERTIE. *(A little ruffled)* Have you had your supper?

BERT. *(L.C.)* Yes. Just had it downtown.

MERTIE. *Why* didn't you wait 'til you got home?

LAURA. We didn't want to bother, Mom.

MERTIE. You never thought of that before you was married. I'm still your mother, and I can give you a meal once in a while, the same as I've always done.

BERT. That's fine of you, Mother—but now we're married, we want to feel a little independent.

MERTIE. You was independent enough. Getting married without saying anything to anybody!

RUPERT. *(Down L., crossing to* BERT U.L.C.*)* Yes, sir. You put it over on the Q.T. all right. Congratulations.

BERT. Thanks.

RUPERT. I see you have a car.

BERT. A car? You flatter us. Don't be sure of that 'til you see it.

MERTIE. Is it paid for?

RUPERT. There you are, Bert. Hit that one over the fence.

BERT. It certainly is. I've got the title right here in my pocket.

MERTIE. *(Crossing to chair* R.C., *sitting)* I don't want to see it. All Rupert's been talking around here is buying an automobile. He'll be buying one, too, before we know it.

RUPERT. I wish we had one now—we could use it for the party tonight.

BERT. *(Coming to life)* Oh, have you got a party on?

RUPERT. Yep—all cooked up!

BERT. (LAURA *crosses to him* L.C.) Hear that, Laura? Where you going?

RUPERT. Down to Tom's place. Better come along.

BERT. Maybe we will. Are you too tired to go, Laura?

RUPERT. *(Slapping* BERT *on the back) That's* the chatter! Start the homecoming with a big bang. We can use your car.

LAURA. *(Starting* U.R.*)* I'll have to change my dress.

TAVIE. That won't take a minute. Come on!

RUPERT. *(Running to stair door from* L. *to* R.*)* All aboard, Joe.

JOE. *(Offstage)* Be right down.

LAURA. *(At foot of stairs—*RUPERT *in dining room)* Which room, Mom?

MERTIE. The same room you've always used—of course.

LAURA. Coming, Bert? *(Exit upstairs.)*

BERT. *(Picking up suitcases, crossing to stairs)* Be right with you. Might as well get settled now as any time. Eh, Mother? Gee! It seems good to be home.

RUPERT. *(Calling and singing as* BERT *exits)* That's right, Bert. Be it ever so humble—you know—— *(Crossing down to sideboard.)*

MERTIE. *(To* TAVIE *in chair* D.R.*)* There! Did you hear what he said about getting settled? I guess you'll believe it now.

TAVIE. It won't be so bad, Mom.

MERTIE. *(Rising to* C., *above table)* It's a funny thing that young people don't think where they're going to live before they get married, instead of throwing themselves on their folks. They don't ask no questions, either. Just move in and take possession. If your father had any backbone, he'd tell him a thing or two, but you couldn't budge him with dynamite.

FRED. *(Comes* D.L.C.*)* What couldn't budge me with dynamite?

MERTIE. These things that are happening around here.

FRED. Nothing's happened as far as I can see. They're here, ain't they?

MERTIE. Oh, yes——

FRED. Well, what about it? Who cares?

MERTIE. I care!

FRED. Why should you? You expected them, didn't you?

MERTIE. But, Fred, that's not the *point!*

FRED. *(Turns away* L.*)* Oh, my God!

MERTIE. When a fellow marries a girl he's supposed to take care of her. And what do they do but start in by buying an automobile and coming to live with us.

FRED. Well, what would you have said if they hadn't?

RUPERT. *(To* R.C. *below table. Lending a hand)* I'll tell you what she'd have said——

TAVIE. *(Stopping him)* Rupert—please don't talk about it.

RUPERT. Why not? Doesn't your mother care for a real man's opinion once in a while?

MERTIE. (FRED *crosses to mantel to light pipe)* Who ever told you you ever had one?

RUPERT. Lots of people.

MERTIE. If you was as smart as your friends think you are, you'd learn when to keep still.

RUPERT. Oh, is that so?

MERTIE. *(Turning to* D.L.*)* You can hear all right.

RUPERT. *(Crossing to* U.C., *hitting* FRED *on back as he lights his pipe)* Well, the head of the house is ready for a man's opinion. Am I right, old timer?

FRED. *(Exploding)* What in hell is the matter with you, anyway? Who told you to butt into this thing?

RUPERT. I'm not butting in. I'm trying to tell you something.

FRED. Peddle your half-baked knowledge to people that will listen to you. I don't want to hear it.

RUPERT. Where'd you get the idea it was half baked?

FRED. *(Yelling)* You never say anything else around here.

MERTIE. Stop yelling, Fred. You'll scare the neighbors.

TAVIE. *(Taking his hand, getting him out)* Come out in the kitchen, Rupert, while I get a drink of water.

RUPERT. *(Crossing to* R., *exiting with* TAVIE*)* All right, Tavie. But I wonder where the big noise gets that half-baked stuff.

MERTIE. *(Crossing to chair* L. *of table, sitting)* I guess you begin to think what I told you about him is so. You ain't seen him as much as I have.

FRED. *(Nursing his shoulder)* Oh, he's all right, but he's too damn friendly.

JOE. *(Entering* U.R.*)* All set to go, folks? Where is everybody?

MERTIE. Rupert and Tavie are in the kitchen. Did you see Laura?

JOE. Yes. They got back quick, didn't they?

MERTIE. They must have run out of money.

JOE. *(*R.C.*)* Oh, Mom—give 'em a chance.

MERTIE. Well, they bought one of them automobiles.

JOE. What? Gosh, that's great!

FRED. *(At the window)* You can see it from here if you look out the window.

JOE. *(Crossing to window)* Say, that's great! That don't look like they was broke.

MERTIE. Don't look like anything else to me. I'll bet you'll have to fill it with gasoline before you get to the dance tonight.

JOE. *(Down* L. *of her)* Are we going to use it?

MERTIE. Of course Rupert asked for it, but you'd

better talk him out of it. Like as not he'll want to drive it, and the next thing you know you'll all be hanging over telegraph wires.

JOE. I'll see that he doesn't.

MERTIE. That's right. You're the only one in the family that's got any sense. It's too bad you don't use it oftener.

RUPERT. *(Enters with* TAVIE. RUPERT *crosses to stairs)* Well, here we go, Joe. Let's get assembled. Time and tide, you know. *(Calling upstairs)* Slip out of the crow's nest, Bert—we're waiting.

TAVIE. (JOE *is* C.) We're going in the automobile, Joe.

JOE. Some class to us, I'll say.

RUPERT. *(Crossing* D.R.C.) Yes, Mrs. F.—we're about to take our reluctant leave.

JOE. *(Running to the stair door)* You almost ready, Laura?

LAURA. *(Offstage)* Coming right down. *(Calling)* Tavie?

TAVIE. *(Hurrying* R.C. *to stair door)* What?

LAURA. Have you got a clean handkerchief? (JOE *crosses, sits on arm of chair* L.C.)

TAVIE. No, but Mom has. It's down here.

BERT. *(Entering from stair door)* Here we are, folks—give us a look!

RUPERT. The old married man himself.

BERT. *(Calling back upstairs)* Hurry up, Sweetheart. And *folks*—don't forget your pocketbooks.

MERTIE. *(To* FRED, L.C.) There, Fred—I knew he was broke.

RUPERT. Start the exasperator, Bert. We'll be right out. Do you have to crank it?

BERT. *(Crossing to arch* L.C. *and exiting)* What—for three hundred dollars?

MERTIE. *(Rising as* JOE *crosses to arch* U.L.) Joe, that's not the shirt I told you to wear!

JOE. You said the one on top.

MERTIE. I didn't, either. But it's too late to change now. (JOE *exits on the run—slams door.)*

LAURA. *(Coming down stairs)* Where's Bert?

TAVIE. He's already out to the car. Hurry up!

MERTIE. *(Sitting in Morris chair* L.C.*)* You'll find a clean handkerchief in that top drawer, Laura.

LAURA. *(Going to sideboard)* Thanks, Mom.

RUPERT. *(Both center)* That dress looks mighty sweet on you, Tavie.

TAVIE. Do you like it?

RUPERT. The best yet—all you need is the frame.

LAURA. That's another new dress up in my clothes press, too, isn't it, Tavie?

TAVIE. *(Nervous)* Yes—I'll show it to you when we get home.

MERTIE. New dress! It's the first I've heard about it. When did you get it?

TAVIE. Last Thursday.

LAURA. Tavie, how do you have so many clothes? I never had them and I earned more, too.

MERTIE. Laura, I've been wondering about that myself.

TAVIE. Come on, Rupert. Let's go. *(She exits into the hall.)*

RUPERT. This way to the chariot, Laura. (LAURA *passes him to the door.)* Bye-bye, Mother. So long, Pop. *(He starts toward the hall, gingerly putting on his hat)* And don't worry, Mother, because I'll be driving. *(The door slams.)*

(MERTIE *and* FRED *look out the window as*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT II

SCENE ONE: *The setting remains the same. It is half an hour later in the evening of the same day.*

FRED *is discovered seated at the left of the table center. He has taken the old-fashioned clock from the mantel and has it in front of him. The front is open. In one hand he holds a small toothbrush, in the other a small screwdriver. He has his glasses on and is peering into the works.*

MERTIE *enters through the arch from the dining room. As she clears the arch her eyes settle on* FRED. *She stops suddenly, raises her eyes to heaven in despair, and says with disgust:*

MERTIE. Well, good Lord!

FRED. *(Looks up from his work—pauses as he sees* MERTIE—*senses that something is wrong)* What's the matter with *you?*

MERTIE. Nothing's the matter with *me*—it's *you* —trying to make that clock run!

FRED. *(A little heated)* My God! It's been running for thirty years, ain't it? *(Controlling his anger)* It needs cleaning.

MERTIE. *(Going to sideboard for sewing)* If that's what it needs, let somebody do it that *can*—because you can't!

FRED. How do you know I can't?

MERTIE. *(Crossing down* R.C. *with her sewing)* You never *have* done anything right! How do you expect to make a clock run? When you get through with it we'll have to buy a new one! Watch what I tell you.

FRED. *(More impatient than ever)* Maybe we *need* a new one!

MERTIE. You keep on fooling with *that* and we're *going to!* Any minute I expect to see the works flying all over the room!

FRED. *(Completely out of patience. Rising—throwing down his screwdriver and toothbrush)* My God, Mertie, what's the matter with you? You think I can't do anything! If I hadn't *touched* the old clock, you'de be *asking* me to fix it. Now that I'm *trying to,* you're *asking* me why I am!

MERTIE. *(She bites her lips and very pointedly remarks)* I'm not asking you anything—I'm just telling you, you *can't* fix it! *(Sits in chair* R.C.*)*

FRED. *(Getting control of himself and sitting down, grumbling to himself more than to* MERTIE*)* Well, I may fool you.

MERTIE. *(Looking over at* FRED*, sarcastic and satisfied)* Huh! If you do, it'll be the first time you did. *(There is a long pause, followed by a ring of doorbell.)* I wonder who that is?

FRED. *(Not having recovered from* MERTIE'S *last remarks)* You can't find out sitting there!

MERTIE. Oh, you! *(She rises and goes to the sideboard, where she leaves her sewing. As she turns toward the hall she stops above table* C.*)* Now, if it *is* someone calling, don't you be fussing with *that clock!*

FRED. I will if it's someone I don't care to talk to.

MERTIE. Then take it in the kitchen! I want you to act like a civil human being if you stay in here.

FRED. Oh, go answer the doorbell! (MERTIE *gives him a dark look and passes into the hall* U.L. FRED *returns to his clock.)*

MERTIE. *(Offstage)* Oh—Mrs. Thorne——

FRED. *(Growling)* Oh, good Lord—there's *never* any peace around this house!

(SARAH, *offstage* L.U. SARAH *is a typical gossip. She is unpleasant in appearance and voice, and is never happier than when she is in other people's affairs.)*

SARAH. How are you, Mertie? I seen your light and I thought I'd stop in. I just *got* to have somebody to talk to once in a while!

MERTIE. That's right—I'm glad you did. Fred, it's Mrs. Thorne.

FRED. *(Sarcastic)* That's nice!

MERTIE. *(Appearing in the arch* U.L., *followed by* SARAH*)* There ain't much chance to talk, hanging around the house all the time, is there?

SARAH. It's a lovely evening, ain't it? *(Crossing* D., *on* FRED'S L.*)* Good evening, Fred.

FRED. How are you, Sarah?

SARAH. Oh, I ain't feelin' very well. But you're looking all right.

FRED. I don't know why I should.

SARAH. Whatcha doin'? Fixin' the clock?

FRED. I'm trying to.

SARAH. What's the matter? Don't it run?

FRED. No—it's resting!

SARAH. *(Seriously)* Oh!

MERTIE. *(Above table* C.*)* It stopped tonight, and Fred's trying to fix it.

SARAH. *(With a sigh)* Well, if he *can* fix it, he can do more than *my* husband!

FRED. Huh! Who couldn't?

MERTIE. Oh, Fred's that way, Sarah. He's *always* got to *monkey* with *something.*

SARAH. Our old clock stopped last month, *too*—and *Garth* said he could fix it. I knew all the time he *couldn't* and I *told* him so. But he kept right on *monkeying* with it. He wouldn't listen to me. *Finally* we had to get a *new one!*

FRED. You could probably *make* a new one with the *works* he had left!

SARAH. Huh! *(Turning to* MERTIE*)* You can't tell a man *anything* these days, can you? They're all so smart!

FRED. Good Lord, they *have* to be! God knows they don't get any help from the women!

MERTIE. Now, Fred! *(Offering chair* R. *of table)* Better have a chair, Sarah.

SARAH. *(Crossing to* R. *of table, sitting)* Well, now that I'm here, I can't stay long, Mertie. Garth will be wondering where I am, and start right out looking for me.

MERTIE. *(Taking her own chair* R.C.*)* Huh! You're lucky! Fred wouldn't ever do any looking for me. I could be gone all night—it wouldn't bother *him* a bit.

FRED. *(Looking over the clock)* Huh!

SARAH. Garth's a pretty good man for that. I *trained* him when he was *young!*

FRED. He looks it!

SARAH. What?

MERTIE. Don't pay any attention to him, Sarah. He's always grunting about something.

SARAH. *(Sadly)* He's just like Garth, I suppose. *(Looking at* FRED*)* Goes around the house with a sour look on his face from morning till night. *(To* MERTIE*)* I never *could* get much out of that man. But *most women* are lucky if they get their living.

MERTIE. *(Leaning forward)* You get *that*, don't you?

SARAH. *(With a peculiar nod of approval and satisfaction)* Oh, yes—I get *that*—you betcha!

MERTIE. *(Leaning back) Any man* that can give a woman a living, such as it is, is a pretty good man, these days. *(Pointing her finger at* SARAH*)* You don't find many of 'em.

SARAH. No, you don't. I'm glad I never had any girls. I'd be afraid they'd marry some poor fool and *starve to death.* (FRED *gives* SARAH *a quick look.* MERTIE *winces, looks at* FRED.*)* You weren't so lucky there—wuz you?

MERTIE. My girls won't have to worry any! The men *they marry* will be able to *keep 'em!*

SARAH. It's pretty *risky*, though! *All these young people gettin' married just scares me.*

FRED. Sarah, what are you talking about? You don't see any of them starving, do you?

SARAH. *(Nasty twang)* You don't see 'em settling down and making homes, either! The first thing they do is *buy an automobile! (To* MERTIE*)* That's what that fool that married *Jim Gate's* daughter did! Not a cent to his name, but he would buy one of them things. And then they came right home and started living with her folks! *Wasn't that nerve?*

MERTIE. Nobody will ever do that in this house.

FRED. Why, Mertie!

MERTIE. *(Quickly)* Fred, you hush up!

SARAH. Everybody seems to be *doing it.* It's gettin' to be the *popular thing.*

MERTIE. Yes, it's *popular*—but it ain't the right thing to do.

SARAH. That's just what I told Jennie Gates. You know *her*, though. One of those *model mothers.* Believes in raising children by spoilin' *'em.* I always knew that kid would run over her. I'm not saying

anything against Jennie, understand. She's a nice enough woman, but she ain't got any *backbone!*

MERTIE. Of course she hasn't!

FRED. *(Unable to keep out any longer)* She ought to be *glad* she *hasn't!*

SARAH. *(Turning to* FRED*)* Hasn't what?

FRED. Any backbone!

MERTIE. What do you mean, Fred?

FRED. This backbone you're talking about is nothing but bone in your head! I can remember when women used to *mother* their children—just like Jennie Gates is doing.

SARAH. *(Laughs sarcastically at* FRED*)* Ain't you funny! *(To* MERTIE*)* He talks just like Garth. Says a lot of words, but there's never any sense to it.

FRED. *Most* women don't recognize sense when they hear it.

SARAH. Is that so? Well, if I had a daughter and she married somebody, they wouldn't live under my roof, I can tell you that. It would be his business to keep her!

MERTIE. That's right!

SARAH. *(Biting her lips)* No, sir—they wouldn't make no slave out of me!

MERTIE. You're right, Sarah!

FRED. *(Pointing his screw-driver at* SARAH—*slightly angry)* Let me tell you something! If you had a daughter that was fool enough to marry a man without first finding out whether he could keep her, it would serve you right if you had to keep *him!*

SARAH. *(Bristling)* Oh, it's our fault when our children make fools of themselves, is it?

FRED. Sarah, for once you're a good guesser.

SARAH. *(Turning to* MERTIE*)* There you are! *(Pointing at* FRED *across the table)* There's a lot of sense to that, ain't there? All men are alike, Mertie.

Garth talks like him all the time. He never says anything now. He knows I won't argue with him.

FRED. Huh! You've got him *speechless!*

MERTIE. I won't argue with Fred, either. There ain't no sense to it.

FRED. No—there's nothing goes on in this house but quiet conversation.

SARAH. Where's Joe and Tavie?

MERTIE. They've gone out for the evening.

SARAH. *(As if it was a calamity)* Young people don't stay home much, do they?

MERTIE. *(Rising in their defense)* They stay home enough! People have only one life to live—they might as well live it. Once they get settled down, they'll never see anything. They might as well go while they're young.

SARAH. *(Prying for information)* You ain't heard nothin' from Laura since she left, I suppose?

MERTIE. Laura's home, Sarah.

SARAH. Home? Land sakes!

MERTIE. Yes, she came home tonight, and brought her man with her. They've gone out with Tavie and Joe! *(Smiles)* They're celebrating!

SARAH. Ain't that just like 'em—*the first night!* No sooner get home than *out* they go! *(With a shade of seriousness)* She didn't tell you why she ran away to marry that feller, did she?

MERTIE. *(Quick look to* SARAH*)* No, I didn't ask her!

SARAH. *(As if it were the truth)* Mertie, you don't think she *had to?*

MERTIE. Sarah Thorne, what are you saying——

SARAH. I guess, by this time, she's sorry for what she's done, ain't she?

MERTIE. Now, why should she? Getting married ain't anything to be *sorry for!*

SARAH. No, that ain't nothin'! It was her *running*

away that made it look so bad. A lot of people in the church was speaking about it.

FRED. *(Irritated)* I guess if anything was said, you was the one that started it.

SARAH. *(Shocked)* Well! Ain't you sour tonight!

FRED. Why shouldn't I be?

MERTIE. *(Seeing* FRED *is angry)* Now, Fred——

FRED. *(Losing his temper)* Mertie, I don't want any misunderstanding about Laura. Our daughter is married—that's done. What she and Bert Connelly decided to do is their business—*not* the world's. *(To* SARAH*) I want you to remember it!*

SARAH. *(Fussed)* Well, people always say them things.

FRED. *(Rising)* Yes—because they're a lot of psalm-singing hypocrites who haven't enough charity to think anything else! *(Crossing* L. *in disgust.)*

SARAH. *(Leaning toward him)* Well, your Joe is making up to Mary Flemming, ain't he? What'll folks think about that?

FRED. *(Turning to her)* They won't think anything about it!

MERTIE. Joe and Mary are kids, Sarah—they're not serious!

SARAH. *(A solemn nod)* Seems to me, if I had any children I'd keep *watch of 'em!*

FRED. *(Surveying* SARAH *quietly over his glasses)* Well, Sarah, there was some children God was good to. He didn't give them to you.

SARAH. *(Sticking)* If I *did have* any, I'd know where they *were* and what they were *doing!*

FRED. We know what our children are doing. Don't you fret about that!

SARAH. Well, there's a lot of people that don't! I suppose you heard what's been going on at the store.

MERTIE. What store?

SARAH. Haugen's Department Store! Didn't Tavie tell you? (FRED *sits* L. *of table* C.)

MERTIE. No, Tavie hasn't said a word about it.

SARAH. *Garth* was telling me tonight that one of the clerks has been *stealing!*

MERTIE. Stealing?

SARAH. That's what he said.

MERTIE. *Who* was telling *him?*

SARAH. Mr. Flemming!

FRED. Mary Flemming's father?

SARAH. *(To* FRED) That's the one. He looks after the accounts down there, and he told Garth one of the clerks has been lifting things.

MERTIE. Did he say who it was?

SARAH. No, he didn't. Only he thought it was one of the clerks.

MERTIE. What made him think that?

SARAH. Well, you know Garth has charge of all the clothes in the ready-made department.

MERTIE. Yes?

SARAH. Every garment is tagged and numbered, and the numbers are on file in the office. That's where Mr. Flemming works, you know. When anything is sold, the clerk sends the tag to the office, and they know the goods have been purchased.

MERTIE. I see.

SARAH. Well, Mr. Flemming was checking his accounts and found that certain numbers had been in stock too long—so he came to Garth and asked why they hadn't moved. When Garth went to look for them, they were gone.

MERTIE. *(With interest)* Yes—well?

SARAH. Well, if he couldn't find them, they'd been stolen, hadn't they?

MERTIE. *(Pauses. Strange thoughts are troubling her, trying to connect things up)* I suppose so—— *(She speaks with concern)* Mr. Thorne didn't say what the articles was, did he?

SARAH. Yes, he said they were dresses!

MERTIE. *(Quickly)* Dresses! *(Thinking of* TAVIE*)* It was a girl, then!

SARAH. It must be! Some fool girl that works down there.

MERTIE. Most likely.

SARAH. *(Straight at* MERTIE*)* I'm just dying to find out if it's anyone we know—*ain't you?*

MERTIE. *(Winching a little)* I'd like to know—yes—but like as not we've never heard of her.

FRED. *(Who has been listening)* Well, whoever it is, I'm sorry for her.

SARAH. *(Sharply)* Sorry if she's a thief?

FRED. Girls don't steal dresses for nothing, Sarah. I hope it ain't so——

(There is a sharp ring on the doorbell. MERTIE *jumps.* FRED *sees her.)*

MERTIE. Good Heavens!

FRED. *(Rising)* What's the matter, Mertie? What are you jumping about?

MERTIE. *(Collecting herself)* That doorbell scared me.

SARAH. Maybe it's *Garth* out looking for me!

FRED. Most likely. *(Moving to arch* U.L. *and exiting)* It's getting late for callers.

MERTIE. *(Rising—crossing to sideboard)* I'd better take off my apron for fear it *is* somebody.

FRED. *(Offstage)* Oh, Mr. Flemming, come in.

SARAH. *(Greatly concerned)* Oh, Mertie—it's Bill Flemming from the store.

MERTIE. *(Holding her own)* I can hear all right!

FLEMMING. *(Offstage* U.L.*)* I'm sorry to come so late, Fred, but——

FRED. Oh, that's all right. Come right in. *(The two men appear in the arch.)*

FLEMMING. Good evening, Mrs. Ferguson.

MERTIE. Good evening, Will.

SARAH. *(As* FLEMMING *crosses* D.L., *she goes to him)* Good evening. What's happened, Mr. Flemming? Is anything wrong?

FLEMMING. *(Cold as ice)* Sarah, what are you talking about? *(To* MERTIE, D.R., FLEMMING *stays* L.*)* Mrs. Ferguson, I don't wish to interfere, but it is necessary that I see you alone.

SARAH. *(Quickly)* What?

FLEMMING. I'm very sorry, but under the circumstances I must ask Mrs. Thorne to say—good night.

SARAH. Why, what have I done? (MERTIE *crosses to her* L.C.*)* Oh, Mertie, it must be something awful!

FLEMMING. Nothing of the kind, I assure you.

MERTIE. *(Nervous)* Well, Sarah, you'd better go.

SARAH. It must be something terrible, Mertie! You know what I think? *(This as they are crossing* U.L.*)*

FRED. *(Above table,* C.*)* Whatever *you think,* we don't want to hear it.

SARAH. *(Crossing to him)* Oh, is that so?

FRED. Yes, it is! This is only something more for you to talk about—but *don't say too much!*

SARAH. I'll say anything I like, Fred Ferguson!

FRED. *(Quietly, but firm)* Sarah, if they could arrest people for talking, you'd be in jail most of the time!

MERTIE. *(Trying to save the situation)* Keep still, Fred. You're only making a fool of yourself. Don't listen to him, Sarah. He don't know what he's saying.

SARAH. *(Getting herself together)* He's just like Garth. Always saying mean things. I'll not stay where I'm not wanted—don't worry! Some day, Fred Ferguson, you'll be sorry! I'll be over right after breakfast, Mertie. *(She crosses to the arch)* Good night.

MERTIE. *(Following)* Good night, Sarah. (FRED *moves up to the arch and meets* MERTIE *as she returns.)*

FRED. The old buzzard! I'd like to slap her face.

MERTIE. Why didn't you? You had the chance. I never saw such a pest! *(Crossing back of table)* Won't you sit down? (MERTIE *is nervous)* Fred, see if that front door is closed. I can feel a draft some place. (FRED *exits and returns immediately.)* Sit here, Mr. Flemming. *(It is the chair* L. *of table* C. FRED *comes down and sits* L.C.*)*

FRED. Now, Will, what is it?

FLEMMING. *(A dear friend of the family who does not want to hurt them)* Fred, I don't know whether I'm on a wild-goose chase or not, so I don't want anything I say to alarm either of you.

MERTIE. *(Sitting* R. *of table* C.*)* Well?

FLEMMING. Is your daughter Tavie at home?

FRED. No, Will, she isn't.

MERTIE. She went down town with some friends of hers.

FLEMMING. That's too bad! What time were you expecting her back?

MERTIE. I don't suppose they'll be home much before midnight.

FLEMMING. That's pretty late for me. I'm sorry, for I particularly wanted to see her.

MERTIE. You did?

FLEMMING. Yes.

MERTIE. What about?

FLEMMING. Well, I thought she might be able to clear up a little difficulty we've been having down at the store. It's in Tavie's department, you understand, and I thought she could help me out.

MERTIE. Oh, it's in the ready-made department?

FLEMMING. Yes. But since Tavie isn't here, I won't say anything more about it. I'll see her in the morning. *(Rising, turning* L.*)*

MERTIE. *(Stopping him)* Just a minute, Will. Whatever concerns our Tavie concerns us, too. If she's in trouble, we want to know it.

FLEMMING. That's true, Mrs. Ferguson—but if you don't mind, I'd rather keep silent about the matter until I've talked with Tavie and become a little more sure of my ground.

MERTIE. You make me nervous, talking the way you do. If it's trouble, I want to know it.

FLEMMING. I never like to invite trouble, Mrs. Ferguson. We all get our share without looking for it.

MERTIE. Well, the Lord knows I've had enough of it. And I never try to make it, either. But you wouldn't come here tonight to see Tavie if it wasn't important.

FRED. Will, I think you'd better tell us.

FLEMMING. *(Surrendering, sitting* L. *of table* C.*)* All right, Fred—but let's not cross any bridges 'til we get to them. The fact is, one of the clerks in the ready-made department has been stealing some dresses, and the forewoman told me this evening she thought it might be your daughter Tavie.

FRED. *(Rising)* What?

MERTIE. Our Tavie—impossible!

FLEMMING. I know Tavie is a thoroughly reliable girl, Mrs. Ferguson—quite beyond suspicion. That's why I wanted to talk with her, here. We might straighten out the matter. You haven't noticed anything?

MERTIE. What do you mean?

FLEMMING. The clothes she's been wearing lately haven't surprised you, have they?

MERTIE. Why, no——

FRED. Mertie, weren't you saying something to Laura about——

MERTIE. *(Ignoring* FRED*)* There's nothing Tavie has she doesn't buy or make herself.

FLEMMING. You know how much Tavie earns, don't you, Mrs. Ferguson?

MERTIE. She earns fifteen dollars a week.

FLEMMING. Does she save a little each week?

MERTIE. What difference does that make?

FLEMMING. I was wondering whether she spent it all.

MERTIE. Well, if she does, it's her own right. She earns it—she has a right to spend it. She might as well be foolish when she's young. It's the only chance she'll ever have, and fifteen dollars a week will buy all the clothes she needs.

FRED. Mertie, there may be something to what Will is saying.

MERTIE. *(Crossing* L.C. *to* FRED*)* Fred, there isn't! Don't interfere in things you don't know anything about. The whole thing is idiotic. The idea of anybody thinking such a thing! (MERTIE *crosses up to the window.)*

FLEMMING. I'm not accusing Tavie, Mrs. Ferguson. I just called to have a talk with her. I want you to know there isn't anything in God's world I wouldn't do to protect this thief from Mr. Haugen.

MERTIE. *(Crosses to* FLEMMING*)* Mr. Haugen doesn't know about it, does he?

FLEMMING. Yes. That's why I wanted to see Tavie, or anyone else who might be guilty. Because, whoever it is, Haugen is going to make it pretty hard for them. Two years ago he sent up a girl for five years for stealing a dozen handkerchiefs—never gave her half a chance——

FRED. God, that's brutal, Will!

FLEMMING. That's Haugen, Fred—and I know he won't show any leniency in this case either. He'll railroad this girl to prison so fast it will make your head swim—and then he'll use her as an example against stealing in the store—the same as he did with the other one.

FRED. I'm sorry for her.

FLEMMING. I am too, for if Haugen gets her, there isn't one chance in a thousand for her to get out of it. I'm glad to know you think it isn't Tavie—

MERTIE. It isn't, Will. You can make up your mind to that—— *(Crossing to window—nervous.)*

FLEMMING. I'm glad, but I wouldn't say anything about it to her, if I were you. It will only upset her, and it might prevent me finding the right party.

MERTIE. All right, we won't.

FLEMMING. By the way, how's Joe getting on with his correspondence course?

FRED. He don't do much with it, Will. Working on some bridge plans. I hear he's spending most of his time over at your house.

FLEMMING. Yes, I do see him around there quite a bit lately. But Joe is a good boy. He's got a lot of stuff in him.

MERTIE. *(Crossing* D. *to* WILL*)* What's the whole thing look like to you? Is there anything serious in it?

FLEMMING. Well, as far as I'm concerned, Joe and Mary can be as serious as they like—I like it!

MERTIE. Well, Joe has got other things to think about besides getting married, Will.

FLEMMING. Still, it's something that's got to keep going on, Mrs. Ferguson. I don't think there's much we can do to stop it.

MERTIE. Just the same, I hope Joe and Mary aren't thinking about it yet.

FLEMMING. Well, as long as Mary is running around with Joe, I'm not going to sit up nights worrying about her. When you haven't anything but girls around the house, Fred, it's good to have a boy like Joe hanging around. Well, good night, Mrs. Ferguson. (FLEMMING *crosses to* U.L. *arch.)*

MERTIE. *(At window)* Good night, Will.

FRED. *(Following up)* I'll light that porch light for you, Will. Those steps are kind of bad.

FLEMMING. *(Exiting)* I guess I can find the way all right. Good night!

(There is a troubled pause for MERTIE. *She glances at the door as the men go out. Her misery is not so great as her anger. She crosses to the window and looks out. Then she comes back center. As* FRED *comes into the room she turns on him.)*

MERTIE. Here's a fine mess to straighten out!

FRED. *(Stopping just inside the arch)* What do you mean? *(Then down on a line with her)* My God, Mertie—you don't really think that Tavie——

MERTIE. *(Crossing to him)* What Mr. Flemming came to see her for is true! *(Crossing down a little)* I know it! *(Turning again to* FRED *as he comes* D.L.*)* That dress Laura was asking about—the dress Tavie has got on this very minute—*she stole! (Crossing to* R., *in front of table)* Oh, my God, Fred—she's a thief!

FRED. *(*L.C.*)* Now, wait a minute, Mertie. Don't jump at conclusions.

MERTIE. *(Going* U.R.*)* Conclusions? *(Turning and looking at him)* Don't talk like a *fool!* She's a thief, I tell you.

FRED. *(With level force)* That's a terrible thing to call your daughter, Mertie. You'd better wait until you know what you're talking about.

MERTIE. *(Coming* C., *above table)* I *do know* what I'm talking about. I've been walking around blind or I'd have noticed it before. It's her running around with that fool, Rupert Striker. That's what's done it. He's the one that's put all this into her head. *Him,* with his *silly talk* and his *crazy dude airs!*

FRED. *(Disgusted)* He hasn't a thing to do with it!

MERTIE. *(Crossing to window, looking out* L. FRED *crosses to front of chair* R.C.*)* Oh, hasn't he? Well, you just wait until they get home. I'll show you whether he has or not!

FRED. Mertie—if something *has* happened—I don't want you to make things worse by talking.

MERTIE. *(More temper than reason)* They couldn't *be* any worse. Ain't she been stealing?

FRED. That's something I'd be sure of before I said too much.

MERTIE. *(Out of patience, crossing* D.L.C.*)* Fred, are *you* blind? Here we are with three children we've let go their own way, and see what's happened! I tell you we've had too much faith in them.

FRED. Faith? *(He turns away—and then glances back at her)* Why, Mertie—you never had any!

MERTIE. *(Crossing above table* C.*)* Haven't I done all I *can* for them? Look at Laura! I do *everything* to keep her from being foolish and she does *everything* I tell her *not* to. She's gone and married a man who can't take care of her—and she'll be foolish the rest of her life. Now it's Tavie. I've *talked* to her more than I've *talked* to any of them. *But no!* She won't listen. *None of 'em listen to me any more.* They know it all! What Laura did is bad enough, Fred—but what Tavie has done is enough to drive any mother—*crazy!* Think what it's going to *cost us* to straighten this out.

FRED. *(Pitying* MERTIE *but not sympathizing)* The *cost* will be *more* than you realize. You don't think you're going to get out of this by *paying* for what she's taken?

MERTIE. How else *can* we get out of it?

FRED. *Paying* for what she's taken won't get us out of it. This is a serious business Tavie is up

against, Mertie. She *may* be arrested. They may put her in jail!

MERTIE. *(She looks at* FRED. *Pauses. Crosses* D.L.C.*)* This family ain't never been branded with stealing yet, Fred, and it's not going to happen now. Not while I'm here to stop it.

FRED. What can you do against the law?

MERTIE. *(Defiant)* Who's afraid of the law? Are *you?*

FRED. Yes, I am—everyone is!

MERTIE. Well, I'm not!

FRED. *(Seriously)* Mertie, I'm beginning to think you don't know anything! For God's sake, see some good in somebody, will you? Our own children, at least!

MERTIE. *(She eyes* FRED *with contempt. Crosses to him* D.R.*)* What are you trying to do? Put Tavie's guilt on my shoulders? I'm not responsible for her doing a thing like *this!* Haven't I always tried to tell her what's *right?*

FRED. That's the *trouble,* Mertie. You've tried to tell them *all* what you *thought was right*—and you've told it to them—too much. There's a lot of difference between *your* kind of right and the *real thing.*

MERTIE. Well, if Tavie had listened to *me* she wouldn't be facing all this trouble.

FRED. *(*D.R*)* You haven't any proof yet she's facing anything.

MERTIE. I know she *is!* And you'll know it, too, when she gets home. *(Crossing to window, looking out, hoping to see them)* She won't lie to me.

FRED. *(Crossing* U.R. *Smiling, for he is amused)* Oh, yes, she will, Mertie. She'll *lie* if she thinks it's the convenient thing to do.

MERTIE. *(Turning on him, crossing to* C.*)* She never *has* lied to me.

FRED. *(Pause. It is with quiet conviction, as if the house was crumbling over his head)* Something

That Ferguson Family

Act I, Page 45

is coming home to us, Mertie—and I feel awfully sorry—for *you.*

MERTIE. Well, you needn't be.

FRED. You're not going to wait up for them, are you?

MERTIE. Yes, I am. I'm going to stay right here until she opens that front door. This thing is going to be settled *tonight!*

FRED. If you do, Mertie, you'll destroy what little peace we have left in this house. I can guess what you'll say to Tavie, and I warn you it's going to be wrong.

MERTIE. Well, maybe *you* can tell me what I ought to say.

FRED. I can tell you what you ought not to say, but you won't listen.

MERTIE. *(She is puzzled. She crosses to him* D.R.*)* What's really the matter with you? You talk like a man that's lost his senses. Have I done anything in the past that ever hurt anybody?

FRED. *(The question is too much for* FRED. *He gives up)* What's the use? You wouldn't admit it if I told you.

MERTIE. Oh, go to bed!

FRED. *(Crossing to the arch. He turns and looks at* MERTIE*)* Are you going to come too?

MERTIE. No—I'm going to stay right here and wait until they come.

(FRED *shakes his head, opens the stair door and disappears up the stairs slowly.* MERTIE *moves about mechanically, her mind on* TAVIE. *She is not aware of the things she is doing. She crosses to the window, thinks, then to the table when she puts the clock back on the mantel. The brush and small screw-driver she puts in the sideboard drawer. She crosses and pushes the light switch*

L. *of the arch* U.L. *and the lights go down, but not the light on the sideboard. As she picks up her sewing and sits down in her chair* R.C. *the*

CURTAIN SLOWLY DESCENDS

END OF SCENE ONE

(There should be two small spots in the borders. One to stay on for the light on sideboard and focus on chair R.C. Another spot to work on JOE'S desk D.L. when he puts on bracket light over desk.)

SCENE TWO

(The time is almost midnight. The blue is flooding in through the windows. All the lights are out except the lamp on the sideboard.)

(MERTIE *has fallen asleep. She is sitting in her chair* R.C., *her hands resting on her sewing in her lap.)*

(There is a pause after the curtain rises, and the front door opens. It is JOE *and* MARY *returning earlier than the others.* JOE *begins to speak off-stage, while the hall is still dark.)*

JOE. *(Offstage)* Well, here we are, Mary. Just a minute and I'll turn on the light. *(Turns on bracket light in hall)* Did it seem very far to you?

MARY. Why, I didn't *notice* that it was.

JOE. *(Smiling)* That's some compliment to me, all right! I guess we beat the others home, at that. *(Hangs hat on rack)* What time is it?

MARY. *(Looking at wrist watch)* Almost twelve. I hope the others won't be angry, Joe.

JOE. Because we slipped away and left them? Not a chance! *(He comes in through the arch and turns on the bracket light above his desk* D.L.*)* How else could I show you the plans I've made for the new Memorial Bridge?

MARY. *(Coming down* L. *on* JOE'S R.*)* You really think you're going to win that prize?

JOE. *(Taking up drawings)* Gee, Mary, I've worked and thought about it enough to win! And out of it all I honestly think I've slipped them a new idea. You'll think so too when I show you the drawings. I've looked everywhere, and there's nothing like it in bridge building. Just sit down. (JOE *makes a random gesture toward the* R. MARY *turns to the chair* L. *of table* C., *sees* MERTIE *asleep* R.C.)

MARY. Oh! *(To* JOE) Joe—look——

JOE. *(Dropping prints on desk)* Well, I'll be darned. *(Crossing to* C., *observing* MERTIE.)

MARY. Is she asleep?

JOE. *(Pause—smile—satisfied)* Dead to the world!

MARY. *(Starting* R. *below table* C.) We'd better wake her, hadn't we?

JOE. *(Stopping* MARY C.) I should say not! *(Looking at* MERTIE—*back to* MARY.)

MARY. *(Shocked—quietly)* Why, Joe!

JOE. I'm sorry, Mary—but when Mom's awake—*(Close to* MARY—*sincere—not blunt)*—unless she's finding fault about something, she's actually miserable.

MARY. All mothers find fault, Joe.

JOE. Just wait until you know her. *(He makes sure* MERTIE *is asleep again)* No, Mary, we don't want to wake her up—not now! (JOE *crosses to desk* L.)

MARY. *(Watching* MERTIE *a moment—to* JOE) Even if she does find fault, Joe—I can't believe she doesn't love you.

JOE. *(Pauses, arranging blue prints—looks at* MARY) I think she does love me, Mary—only she has a strange way of showing it. *(Breaks the thought)* But never mind—let's not talk about it. I want to show you these drawings. *(Indicating chair* R. *of desk)* Here—sit down. (MARY *crosses and sits. She turns, gazing wistfully at* MERTIE. JOE *looks at*

MARY. *She is a picture to him. The blue prints drop from his hand.* JOE *is in love. He leans over her left shoulder)* Mary, you're wonderful! Do you know it?

MARY. *(Startled, turning toward him)* Why, Joe!

JOE. You are, Mary! Every time I've tried to tell you that before it's stuck in my throat. Now it's out! Why, you're the sweetest and prettiest girl I ever knew—or I'll ever want to know!

MARY. *(She rises—crosses a little* R.*—not daring to look at him)* I'm glad you think so, Joe.

JOE. I do—and I wonder sometimes what you think of me. *(She doesn't face him. Her head raises, showing a smile of happiness.* JOE *doesn't see it. He comes* L. *of her)* You don't think I'm foolish, do you—asking that?

MARY. Foolish? Wondering what I think of you?

JOE. Uh-huh—yes—— Why, Mary, I spend so much time thinking about you I can't even work any more—I'm afraid all the time something's going to happen to spoil things.

MARY. Spoil things?

JOE. Yes. You see, Mary, I don't want to lose you—ever! (MARY'S *head falls.* JOE *doesn't know whether to take her in his arms or not. He hesitates)* Sounds selfish, doesn't it? But if you could realize what your love—(MARY *looks up to him)*—your friendship, I mean, means to me, you wouldn't want to lose it, either.

MARY. Do you think you could ever lose that, Joe?

JOE. I don't like to think about it—for if I did—— Oh, hang it all—can't you see—I love you—I want *you,* Mary, more than anything else in the world!

MARY. *(Looking up to him)* Joe—I've been waiting to hear you say that for months!

JOE. You have? Gee!

MARY. Say it again, will you? I want to be sure.

JOE. Aw—what's the use——

(JOE *takes* MARY *in his arms. At the point of kissing her, he sees* MERTIE *across the room. He hesitates.* MARY *is puzzled, looks at him.)*

MARY. What's the matter?

JOE. *(Indicating* MERTIE*)* Mom—I forgot she was here.

MARY. *(Turning* R. *to* MERTIE*)* Oh——

JOE. *(Crossing to* MERTIE*, making sure she is asleep—back to* MARY*)* She's asleep, all right. If she wakes up it will save us the trouble of telling her. *(Takes* MARY *in his arms. Kissing her)* Sweetheart!

MARY. *(In the embrace)* That sounds wonderful, Joe.

JOE. Sounds pretty good to me, too. *(He looks into* MARY'S *face)* Does it mean a lot to you, Mary?

MARY. Everything! I never thought it could mean so much!

JOE. *(Breaking, clinging to her hands)* Gee, I can hardly believe it—that you've said yes—I mean—that some day you're going to marry me. (MARY *is happy.* JOE *turns* R., *sees* MERTIE. *He sighs)* There's one hitch in it, though. We've got to tell Mom. (JOE *passes his hand around the back of his head, looking from* MERTIE *to* MARY*)* I may think I've just been through something, but that is going to be the toughest job of all!

MARY. Isn't she going to like me, Joe?

JOE. Well—I don't know. We'll have to wait and see. (MARY *is afraid.)* Now there's nothing to be frightened about——

MARY. *(Ready to weep)* She won't like me! I can feel it.

JOE. It isn't you, Mary. It's the idea. You mustn't let it get you now.

MARY. But, Joe, you'll have to tell her.

JOE. Of course I will—and I'm going to. But no matter what she says, it's our happiness we've got to look out for, isn't it? It's you and me and nobody else. You understand that, don't you?

MARY. Yes, Joe—I understand. *(They embrace again.)*

JOE. *(Seeing the drawings on the table)* Gee, I almost forgot what we came home for. *(Indicating chair* R. *of table* L.*)* Sit here, Mary. *(Spreading the drawings before her)* Ever since the day they offered a prize for the best Memorial design, I've seen that bridge grow before my eyes. I've given them a new idea in bridge building, too. You wouldn't understand it if I explained it to you—but it's there. (MARY *is interested, but the drawings are Greek.)* I worked it all out in secret, too. There isn't a soul in the house knows anything about it.

MARY. Not even your mother?

JOE. Not even Mom. I wouldn't tell her—— Not a bit of encouragement from anyone but you!

MARY. Why, I haven't done anything.

JOE. Oh, yes, you have! I never drew a line or erased a pencil mark that you didn't help me. You used to look at me right out of the paper. Funny sometimes, too—you used to talk to me and tell me how proud you were—and then I'd work all the harder! You didn't know you had a share in this, did you?

MARY. *(Touching his arm sincerely)* I'm glad if I did, Joe.

JOE. And just think—tonight they pick the winner! And if it's me—— *(Pauses, then smiles)* Well, I'm not going to think about it. But with you to help me I can win anything. *(Crosses* L.C., *sees* MERTIE*)* I shouldn't wonder, if you stood back of me, I could even win over Mom. Let's tell her now.

MARY. *(Rising)* So soon?

JOE. Sure thing! Might as well get it over.

(Pause. Looks at MERTIE*)* It looks like a battle, though!

MARY. *(Crossing—looking wistfully at* MERTIE*)* Joe, I want to kiss her.

JOE. *(Surprised)* What? Kiss Mom?

MARY. Yes. She looks tired and worried about something.

JOE. Probably dreaming about trouble. Maybe it's us.

MARY. May I, Joe?

JOE. Go ahead! That's a good way to wake her up. But when you do, get under cover. I'll get the expression on her face.

(JOE *crosses extreme* R. MARY *bends down, kisses* MERTIE, *runs to arch* U.L. *Turns up bracket lights.)*

MERTIE. *(Coming to, awkwardly, seeing* JOE, *who is laughing softly)* Joe—what's the matter with you? Have you gone foolish?

JOE. That wasn't me, Mom—it was Mary.

MERTIE. Who?

JOE. *(As* MARY *comes down* L.C.*)* Mary Flemming. She wanted to surprise you.

MERTIE. *(Rising—crossing to sideboard with sewing)* Kissin' folks don't surprise 'em none—not these days! That's all I've heard of lately—people kissin' each other. *(Giving* JOE *a withering look)* Joe—you ain't been doin' that, have you?

JOE. Well, I——

MERTIE. Where's Tavie?

JOE. *(Crossing to* MARY L.C.*)* She isn't here yet. Mary and I came home early.

MERTIE. What'd you do that for? Didn't I tell you to look after that automobile? That fool Striker will be driving it the first thing you know and kill

all of them. *(She glances at the clock)* What time is it?

MARY. A little after twelve, Mrs. Ferguson.

MERTIE. *(Crossing to window* L., *looking out)* And they ain't home yet? I'll bet they've had a wreck or something.

JOE. *(Following* U. MARY *crossing to* C. *below table)* That place doesn't close till midnight, Mom. And besides, Laura and Bert are celebrating.

MERTIE. Celebrating! They've got celebrating enough to do when they get home. *(Crossing back of table* C., *taking candy box to sideboard)* The whole town will probably help them out—including the newspapers! What are you and Mary doing here, anyway?

JOE. *(Pause.* MARY *crossing* L.C. *to him)* Well, you see, Mom—it's like this—we came to tell you—

MARY. *(Catching* JOE'S *arm)* Don't tell her now, Joe—please——

JOE. She's got to know some time, Mary. Hold onto yourself and leave it to me. Mom—it's about us —Mary and me.

MERTIE. *(As it dawns upon her—she realizes that* JOE *might be slipping away from her)* Joe—what's come over you? You haven't lost your head too, have you?

JOE. *(Quietly)* No, we just want to get married, that's all.

MERTIE. Married?

JOE. Yes.

MERTIE. You must be crazy!

JOE. No, Mom, we're not!

MERTIE. *(Crossing* C. *above table)* Now, wait a minute, Joe! You must be out of your heads! What do *you* want to get married for?

JOE. Because we love each other.

MERTIE. *(Raising her eyes to heaven)* Oh, Lord! *(Moving* R.*)* Want to get married because you love

each other. *(R.C. Turning on them)* Is that the only reason you can think of?

JOE. That's reason enough—isn't it, Mary? *(Angry, cross D.L., disgusted—defiant)* Can't I live my own life in my own way?

MERTIE. Haven't you got any sense, Joe?

JOE. *(Returns U.C. above table)* Oh, that's all I hear around here! We haven't got any sense! No one ever *knows* anything—nobody is in their right mind—all of us are *fools!*

MARY. *(Frightened—moving quickly to JOE)* Joe —please—don't be angry——

JOE. *(Spirit's broken)* I'm not angry, Mary. I'm just tired of it all. Ever since I was born I've been looking for a little happiness—something to live for—

MERTIE. *(R.C.)* Who ever told you there *was* such a thing? *(Measured)* Life is a business of hard knocks, Joe. Marriage is just another way of proving it to you.

JOE. Well, I haven't found any happiness living as I am!

MERTIE. *(Crossing above table, reasoning from experience)* And you'll not find any married, either! *(Pause. Fixing her eyes on them)* What are you going to live on—*love?* That won't buy you any furniture, or a house to live in—will it? I want you to begin looking ahead of you.

JOE. We *are* looking ahead!

MERTIE. *(Quickly—rising heat)* I say you're not! Having each other isn't everything there is in this world. Once you're married, you'll find that out. You can be happy under certain conditions, Joe, but things can happen which will make you hate the sight of each other. Once you're married, you're bound to have trouble—and when trouble comes, if you haven't anything to meet it with, somebody else will have to stand it.

JOE. You won't have to worry about us, I can promise you that.

MERTIE. Your sister Laura might have thought the same thing—but you see where she is, don't you? She's camped, bag and baggage, and a husband up in that front room, and that's right where she intends to stay! I'm telling you for your own good, Joe, and *you* too, Mary—if you get married you'll be welching on your folks before the winter sets in. Thirty dollars a week won't support a wife—not these days.

JOE. *(Angry)* Thirty dollars isn't all I'll ever earn!

MERTIE. *(Catching his tone)* It's all you'll ever earn where you are now!

JOE. Well, I don't intend to stay there always. I'll get something better—you just watch me.

MERTIE. *(Level conviction) Joe, that's not the point!* Until you *do* get something better, don't get married. A wife will only stop you!

MARY. *(Crumpled under the brutal attack on* JOE, *she stands it as long as she can. Moves toward* MERTIE C.*)* Please, Mrs. Ferguson—don't—— (MERTIE *turns* R., *disgusted.* MARY *breaks, crossing to* JOE, L.C., *who takes her in his arms.)* Joe, I don't know what to think—I don't know what to say——

JOE. Now, Mary, you mustn't do that——

MARY. *(Crying)* I can't help it—I thought we were going to be happy—and now—she's ruined everything!

JOE. Oh, come now—what does it matter what she says? We love each other, Mary—and nothing that anyone says can ever change that!

MERTIE. *(*R.C.*—disgusted—pitying them)* You poor little fools!

MARY. *(Tears are gone when she hears this. She flares like a little torch)* Don't you call us that! You can't! *(Crossing to* MERTIE C., *below table)* I'm

going to marry Joe—do you understand? We're going to be happy!

MERTIE. What on? Thirty dollars a week?

MARY. On anything! I love Joe and I'm going to marry him!

JOE. *(Crossing to her* L. *proudly)* Mary!

MARY. *(Facing* MERTIE *defiantly)* If you haven't any confidence in Joe, I have! I didn't understand when he tried to tell me—but now I see everything!

MERTIE. I've only told him the truth! And for his own good, too!

MARY. It isn't the truth! *(Quietly)* I wanted to be nice to you. I wanted you to love me. I wanted you to be happy because Joe and I were going to be. You think you can stop our happiness, but you can't.

MERTIE. I don't want to do that, but—how *can* there be any happiness when there's nothing but trouble? Tell me that!

JOE. *(Close to* MARY*)* If there's trouble, Mom—it will be because you make it.

MERTIE. I suppose because your sister, Tavie, has been branded a thief I made her that way?

JOE. What's that?

MERTIE. *(Crossing to window above table* C.*)* There's some more truth you won't want to believe.

JOE. *(Crossing a little* U.L.C. MARY *to* R.*)* What are you talking about, Mom?

MERTIE. Mary's father came here tonight. He wanted to see her about some business. Well, I found out what that business was. Tavie has been stealing dresses!

JOE. *(Knocked out)* Good Lord!

MARY. *(Crossing to* JOE'S R.*)* Joe!

MERTIE. Now, you're so smart, what are you going to do about that?

JOE. I don't know, Mom. We've got to think.

MERTIE. Well, you'd better be doing it, then—and not be spending your time figuring out how you're

going to get married. We've got trouble enough in this family without you two adding any more—let me tell you that. *(Pause.* JOE *is motionless.* MERTIE *goes to front door, opens it, slams it, comes into room)* Did you see Rex when you came in?

JOE. *(Thinking of* TAVIE*)* No—no, Mom, we didn't.

MERTIE. He's probably on the back porch. I'll go let him in. *(Crossing to kitchen door—leaves door open.)*

*(*JOE *follows to the door* R. MARY *joins him, putting her hands on his left arm, turns him to her.)*

MARY. Joe, I'm sorry——

JOE. *(Affectionately)* Never mind, Mary—it's just more trouble—we're used to it.

MARY. Well, I understand *now,* dear. You'd better take me home.

JOE. *(Sighs)* All right——

(A noise is heard in the front hall. It is RUPERT *and* TAVIE. JOE *and* MARY U.L.C. *to window.)*

TAVIE. *(Off* U.L.*)* Aren't you coming in, Rupert?

JOE. Listen—there's Tavie now.

RUPERT. I got to catch that last car, Tavie.

TAVIE. You can stay a minute, can't you?

RUPERT. I don't think I'd better, Sweetheart. It's after twelve! You made me walk home the last time, you know.

TAVIE. You won't have to this time. Bert can drive you.

RUPERT. Sure, that's right! Suppose there's gasoline enough?

TAVIE. Of course there is. Didn't Bert put in five gallons?

RUPERT. *(Turning to discover* JOE *and* MARY*)*

Hello, folks! Here they are, Tavie. You missed the big end of the party tonight, all right!

JOE. We've had party enough, I guess. Where's Laura and Bert?

TAVIE. *(Crossing to table* C., *looking for candy)* They're doing something to the car. Bert said it started to miss, and Laura's holding the flashlight for him. (TAVIE *to sideboard, where she gets candy.)*

RUPERT. *(*C. *above table)* Was that the trouble, Tavie? I didn't say anything, but it sounded to me like a flat tire.

TAVIE. *(Opening candy)* No, it wasn't a flat tire.

MARY. You can see them, Joe. Bert's got the hood up.

RUPERT. *(Taking chocolate—pass some to* JOE *and* MARY) That's where the engine is, all right. They should have thrown in a mechanic when they raffled off that chariot. If he takes my advice, he'll give it a wash and pasture it in a used car stall. If he doesn't, some museum is going to grab it for a relic.

TAVIE. I thought it ran all right. *(Sees light in kitchen)* Did you leave the light burning in the kitchen, Joe?

JOE. No, Mom's out there.

TAVIE. *(Surprised)* What—is she up?

RUPERT. *(Smiling)* Getting a midnight lunch, eh? Say, that's fine!

JOE. *(To* MARY*)* Come on, Mary, let's get out of here.

RUPERT. The shank of the evening, Joe. Better stick around awhile.

JOE. What for?

RUPERT. The sandwiches—the lunch!

JOE. Oh, Mary and I just had ours—didn't we, Mary?

TAVIE. *(Putting candy box on sideboard)* Joe is kidding you, Rupert.

RUPERT. Never too late to render a little social

attention, Tavie. A warm morsel at midnight? The right touch to end a perfect evening.

JOE. *(Smiling)* Warm? This one is going to be *hot!*

RUPERT. Ah! Coffee, I'll bet a dollar.

TAVIE. You don't smell it, do you?

RUPERT. Can't say as I do—but I think I have a cold. Maybe I'd better help her bring it in.

TAVIE. *(*RUPERT *crosses* D.L.C. *to* R., *in front of table)* No—Rupert. You stay here. If Mom is fixing something, I'll help her. *(She starts.* MARY *stops her.)*

MARY. Tavie!

TAVIE. *(Turning* L.*)* Yes?

MARY. *(*D.L. *a step)* Don't go out there, please—

TAVIE. *(At door* R.*)* Why? What's the matter?

JOE. *(Crossing* C. *above table)* Listen, Sis—I think you're in dutch!

TAVIE. *(Crossing* C. *to* JOE*)* In dutch? What about?

(A slam is heard off R. JOE *and* MARY *go* U.L. *to window.* TAVIE C. RUPERT L.C. MERTIE *enters* D.R. *to* R.C.*)*

MERTIE. Well—you got home at last, did you?

TAVIE. Yes, Mom.

MERTIE. I want to talk to you.

TAVIE. What about?

MERTIE. I'll tell you in just a minute.

(BERT *enters* U.L. *with* LAURA, *hands greasy.* LAURA *is talking.)*

LAURA. You can wash your hands in the kitchen, Bert.

BERT. *(Crossing* D.L.C. *to door* R. *Stop* C.*)* It was

one of the spark plugs, folks, but I got it fixed all right.

MERTIE. Bert!

BERT. *(C. below table)* What?

MERTIE. Keep still! I want to talk to Tavie.

BERT. *(Exiting D.R.)* Oh——

LAURA. *(Stopping extreme D.R.)* Why, Mom, what's the matter?

MERTIE. And you too, Laura. I've listened to all the silly nonsense around this house I'm going to. *(To TAVIE)* Tavie, where have you been getting all the clothes you've been wearing lately?

TAVIE. What?

MERTIE. You know what I'm talking about! That dress you've got on. How did you get it?

TAVIE. Why, I got it at Haugen's, of course.

MERTIE. Did you buy it?

TAVIE. *(Angry)* Yes, I bought it! What are you talking about?

MERTIE. The dress that Laura asked you about tonight that's hanging in her clothes press. I suppose you bought that, too!

TAVIE. Yes, I did!

LAURA. Mom—please—if this is something for the family alone——

MERTIE. Keep still, Laura! I don't want to hear a word out of you.

TAVIE. *(Furious)* Mom—this is insulting! I won't stand for it!

MERTIE. *(Catching her tone)* Don't tell me what you'll stand for—you'll answer my questions. I want you to tell me how you've been getting these dresses.

TAVIE. *(Lowering her voice—innocent)* I got them at Haugen's, of course. I get a discount on everything I buy there. All the clerks do.

MERTIE. *(A step closer to her)* Tavie, you're lying to me, and *you know it!* I *know* you've been stealing them!

LAURA. *(A step* U.R.*)* Mom!

MERTIE. *(To* LAURA *quickly)* Yes, she has! Mr. Flemming came here tonight to see her. Said he wanted to talk to her about some business. I found out what it was. Somebody's been stealing dresses down there, and I know, Tavie, that it's you!

TAVIE. *(Trying to hang on)* If you know it—then what do you keep asking questions for?

MERTIE. I want to know whether it's true!

TAVIE. *(Breaking)* Well—it *is* true! *(*JOE *turns to* MARY *and they cross up to window.)*

LAURA. Tavie! *(Unable to believe it.)*

MERTIE. Now, Tavie—you listen to me——

TAVIE. *(Eyes wild with tears and anger)* Mom, if you say that to me again, I'll scream!

LAURA. *(A step to* TAVIE*)* Tavie!

TAVIE. *(Fiercely to* LAURA*)* And you, too! Don't come near me! *(Hysterical)* I don't want anybody to touch me! *(Taking them all in with a sweep)* And don't ask me any questions, either—because I won't answer them! Get out, will you? Get out and leave me alone—— *(Miserable, crying, she crosses to chair* L.C. *Sinking down into it)* Oh, my God—leave me alone——

(Pause. RUPERT *takes in the situation. He goes to* TAVIE'S R., *bending down.)*

RUPERT. Tavie——

TAVIE. *(Crying)* Please, Rupert, don't say anything to me now.

RUPERT. But, Tavie——

MERTIE. *(To* RUPERT*)* You keep out of this!

RUPERT. *(To* MERTIE*)* You're too late, Mrs. F.—I'm in it!

MERTIE. If you think your bluff and hot air is going to get you any place around here you're mis-

taken! Don't try to make out you *are* somebody, because everybody around here knows you're not!

RUPERT. Well, it doesn't make any difference to me, right now, what anybody around here knows I am. You can't break this up! I *know* Tavie is in *trouble,* and if she needs anything, it's a friend—someone to help her; so I'm going to count myself in.

MERTIE. She doesn't need any of your help—or your friendship, either! What she needs is a lawyer!

RUPERT. There's too much law in this house as it is. *(Important)* Let me do a little cross-examining, will you? *(Crossing to* TAVIE'S R.*)* Tavie, what is all this?

TAVIE. *(Sobbing)* It's true, Rupert—it's true!

RUPERT. You have been taking things at the store?

TAVIE. I have, Rupert—I have! Oh, what am I going to do?

RUPERT. *(Not sure, but putting on a good front)* Well, if it's done, it's done! We'll have to think about what you're going to do.

TAVIE. It's too late. There isn't anything I can do—or anyone I can ask to help me——

RUPERT. Help you? Why, listen, Sweetheart——

MERTIE. *(Breaking in)* Sweetheart——

RUPERT. *(To* MERTIE*)* That's what I said, and I wasn't speaking to you. *(To* TAVIE*)* Listen, Tavie—there's me, isn't there? You're not going to leave me out of this, are you? *(Pause.)* Tavie?

TAVIE. *(Controlling her tears)* What?

RUPERT. You know I'll never go back on you, don't you? No matter *what* happens, *we're* going to stick together.

TAVIE. Oh, Rupert—I can't let you——

RUPERT. There, now, Sweetheart——

MERTIE. *(*D.R.C.*)* Will you get out of this house?

RUPERT. *(Crossing* C. *to her)* Please, Mrs. Ferguson, I wish you'd let me handle this thing.

MERTIE. I won't let you handle anything. Joe, will you show this fool the front door?

RUPERT. I've already seen it, Mrs. F. It's a very nice door, and——

MERTIE. *(Stumped)* Laura—call your father!

RUPERT. I've seen your father, too, Laura. Let him sleep!

MERTIE. Will you get out of this house? She'd never stole a thing if it hadn't been for you!

RUPERT. Hadn't been for me?

MERTIE. Yes, you. You put the idea into her head with your high-toned airs and your jabber about money and automobiles. You made her think you was somebody. I've got *you* to thank for this—but since it's happened, we're rid of you forever—and thank God for it!

RUPERT. What do you think I'm going to do, pull out and leave Tavie? Not on your life!

MERTIE. *(Starting for stair door* U.R.*)* I'll show you whether you will or not——

RUPERT. *(Stopping her)* Just a moment, Mrs. F. You say that I'm to blame for all this?

MERTIE. Yes.

RUPERT. Well, if I am, I'll accept the responsibility. I expect to some time—so I may as well begin right now. *(Crossing to* TAVIE, *lifts her from the chair and turns to* MERTIE, *who is* R.C.*)* Tavie, sweetheart—no need of holding out any longer. Rise and face the gun!

MERTIE. What do you mean?

RUPERT. I mean, dear Mother, that Tavie and I are engaged.

MERTIE. What?

RUPERT. We're engaged to be married.

MERTIE. Married!

RUPERT. *(Taking a ring from his pocket)* Of course you don't know it—Tavie doesn't know it—

the whole world doesn't know it—but I know it—and there's the ring to prove it! *(Slips the ring on* TAVIE'S *finger.)*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT III

The setting remains the same. It is nearing five in the afternoon. There is a towel and a shopping-basket on the table.

As the curtain rises MERTIE *is discovered coming from downstairs with two dresses and a suit-box. She looks at them, thinking, then goes to the telephone. As she is about to call, the front door bell rings. She puts down the 'phone, goes to the door and opens it.* FLEMMING *is outside.*

MERTIE. Oh, Mr. Flemming—come right in! *(As* FLEMMING *enters the room)* I thought you would never come, Will! Can't you see I'm almost crazy? What's happened down there?

FLEMMING. Well, nothing—yet! That's why I insisted on your keeping away from the store.

MERTIE. Has Mr. Haugen found out?

FLEMMING. Yes!

MERTIE. Oh, my God!

FLEMMING. He asked me to get the things she had taken.

MERTIE. Mr. Haugen wants them?

FLEMMING. Yes—for evidence, I think.

MERTIE. *(Pause—thinking)* I have them right here, Will. *(Crossing to the sideboard for them)* Two dresses. One of them she's never worn. The other she had on only last night.

FLEMMING. Is this all?

MERTIE. Everything! I've been through all her things and I know exactly what she has.

FLEMMING. All right, Mertie——

MERTIE. I'll pay for the dresses, Will—I'll pay for everything she's taken!

FLEMMING. I know you will, Mertie——

MERTIE. There must be some way for me to help Tavie—if you'd only let me see Mr. Haugen, as I want to, Will——

FLEMMING. Tavie is going to have a better chance alone, Mertie.

MERTIE. How can she with no one to fight for her? Don't you realize what you're asking me to do? She's my girl, Will. I've got to be where she is—if she's in trouble!

FLEMMING. I'm sorry, Mertie—but I think it will be best if you try and face it here—alone!

MERTIE. *(She pauses—thinks—her heart wrung)* Face my children's mistakes, alone! That's all parents seem to do—face their children's mistakes! We bring them into the world—we watch over them—we try to keep them from doing wrong—and in the end —we fail! *(Pause.)* I've got to see Mr. Haugen, Will! All he knows is that Tavie is a thief. She didn't steal those dresses because she needed them, Will! Or because she didn't know any better! She's in love—she's crazy over a blatherskite of a man who's kidded her into believing he is somebody. Do you know what that does to a girl? If Mr. Haugen only knew—he wouldn't send her to prison. I've got to see him, Will—I've just got to——

FLEMMING. All right, Mertie—I'll see what I can do.

MERTIE. I want you to telephone me right away!

FLEMMING. I'll call you as soon as I see Mr. Haugen.

MERTIE. Thank you, Will.

(FLEMMING *exits, slamming the door after him. She pauses, thinking for a moment, crosses to door* D.R., *and the front door bell rings again.* MERTIE *goes to the door.)*

MESSENGER BOY. *(Outside)* Special delivery!

MERTIE. *(Off* L.*)* All right—I'll see that he gets it. *(The front door slams* U.L.*)*

(MERTIE *enters, looking worried at a long official envelope.* LAURA *comes down stairs, hat and pocket-book in her hand.)*

LAURA. What was it, Mom?

MERTIE. A special delivery letter. I hope it's nothing about Tavie. *(Looking closely)* No—it's for Joe!

LAURA. *(Putting on her hat)* I wonder who would send him a special delivery?

MERTIE. I don't know. He's been asking for one for the last week. *(Turning it over)* Must be something important—it's in one of them long envelopes.

LAURA. Maybe it's good news about something.

MERTIE. I'd like to hear some good news about this family—once.

LAURA. *(Going to her)* Oh, Mom—it'll be all right. You wait and see.

MERTIE. *(Giving* LAURA *her basket)* Here's your basket, Laura. Now don't be gone long, because your father will be wanting his supper as soon as he gets here.

LAURA. *(Exiting* U.L.*)* All right, Mom.

(MERTIE *stands* U.C., *holding the letter inquisitively in her hands. She crosses to* JOE'S *desk and puts it down. She lingers at the desk for a moment, picks up blue prints and reads.)*

MERTIE. "Plans for Memorial Bridge——" *(She twists it about in front of her, trying to make something out of it. It means nothing, and she puts them back on the table)* More of Joe's silly nonsense! (MERTIE *picks up the towel from the table* C. *as she exits into the kitchen, closing the door after her.)*

(There is a pause, and then JOE *appears in the arch* U.L. *He looks into the room cautiously, then he tiptoes to the dining room arch* U.R., *then down to the kitchen door, where he listens. There is a sign of satisfaction, as he has located* MERTIE. *He goes up to the* R. *of the arch* U.L., *signalling to someone outside.)*

JOE. It's all right, Mary. Come in!

MARY. *(Comes into the room cautiously, creeps close to* JOE'S L.*)* Are you going to tell her we're married, Joe?

JOE. *(Signalling to speak softly)* Not if we can get away without it. My bag is all packed and everything. All I've got to do is get it.

MARY. Then hurry! I'll wait outside for you.

JOE. No, you stay here. Mom *might* come in—and if she does, I don't want it to look like we were trying to put something over on her. *(Crossing to stair door)* I'll be right down.

MARY. All right.

(There is a pause for MARY. *She is happy as she kisses the ring on her finger. She crosses to the door* D.R. *and listens. Suddenly she springs away from it to the* C. *of the room, expecting someone to enter. No one does and she sighs with relief. She goes to* JOE'S *desk* L. *and looks at the blue prints, seeing the special delivery letter. As she picks it up,* JOE *comes down stairs with a suitcase in his hand. They meet center.)*

MARY. Joe! Look—I found this on your desk!

JOE. *(Taking letter)* Special delivery!

MARY. Oh, if it's about the bridge, Joe!

JOE. I hope it is! *(Opens letter—reads silently.)*

MARY. Is it, Joe?

JOE. *(Taken off his feet)* Listen—"My dear Mr. Ferguson, it is my pleasure to inform you that the plans you submitted for the new memorial bridge in our city have been awarded first prize——" *(Pause.)* Gee——!

MARY. Oh—Joe!

JOE. *(A happy hug for* MARY*)* Mary!

MARY. Isn't it wonderful? Go on—what else does it say?

JOE. "Enclosed is a check for fifteen hundred dollars——" *(Turning over the letter)* Where is it? *(Finding it in the envelope)* Suffering cats! Look at that!

MARY. *(Taking it)* It's for fifteen hundred, all right—and it's signed!

JOE. *(Reading)* "Please call at the city engineer's office at your earliest convenience, as it will be necessary to make arrangements concerning immediate construction." I can't believe it! *(Takes check)* Let's see that check again!

MARY. Joe darling, you've won!

JOE. No, Mary, we've won! And with this check —we'll never come back!

MARY. No, Joe, we'll take the honeymoon on the money we've got. *(Taking the check and putting it in her purse)* This is going into the bank!

JOE. Starting me right, eh? Married only an hour and you're the boss!

MARY. Got to have something to begin housekeeping with, Joe.

JOE. *(Taking her in his arms)* Mary, you're a wonder!

MARY. Am I, Joe?

JOE. Nobody in the world like you. Come on, let's get out of here.

MARY. *(Crossing to window)* I'll see if the coast is clear.

JOE. *(Getting suitcase)* Right!

MARY. *(In despair, turning from window)* Well, it's all off now——

JOE. What is it?

MARY. Bert has just driven up in the car!

JOE. *(Crossing to window)* He's coming in, too. *(Crossing to arch* U.R.*)* Come on, Mary—this way. We can make it out through the dining room.

MARY. But your mother, Joe——

JOE. Mom's in the kitchen. She'll come in through that door as soon as she hears Bert—and then we can make it through the back door. *(Catching* MARY *by the arm and exiting* U.R.*)* Come on—— *(The front door slams.)*

MERTIE. *(Off* R.*)* Is that you, Bert?

(BERT *comes into room* U.L., *smoking a cigar and carrying a newspaper.)*

BERT. Hello, Mother. Where's Laura?

MERTIE. I sent her to the store after some things for your supper. She ought to be here now any minute.

BERT. Oh, all right. *(He sits in the chair* L.C., *reading the paper he has with him.)*

MERTIE. *(Crossing to window* L., *looking out)* I suppose *you've* been riding around in that automobile.

BERT. *(Interested in his paper)* Yes, I have. I had a little business to attend to, and I hoped I'd find Laura here, because I wanted to talk to her about it.

MERTIE. *(Crossing toward the* R.*)* If you had any business to attend to, it was to look after Tavie!

BERT. Rupert said he was going to take care of that, didn't he?

MERTIE. *(R.C.)* And you're just fool enough to believe that, I suppose. If Laura *had* to get married, I don't see why she didn't pick a man with a little sense!

BERT. *(Looking into paper)* I figure she did, Mother.

MERTIE. *(Starting to door* R.*)* You ought to be glad you've got a roof over your head—— *(The front door slams)* Here's Laura now.

BERT. *(Rising, above chair* L.C.*)* Hello, Laura—I've been waiting to see you.

LAURA. *(Holding the basket)* About Tavie?

BERT. I don't know a thing about Tavie—I left that to Rupert. *(Setting basket on table* C.*)* I've got a surprise for you, though. Guess what.

LAURA. You've sold your automobile.

BERT. Haven't sold a thing—I've bought something!

LAURA. What, Bert?

BERT. I've bought a house.

MERTIE. My God!

LAURA. *(Happy)* Already?

BERT. That is, I've almost bought it. Just waiting for your O.K.

LAURA. Where is it, Bert?

BERT. Out on Euclid Avenue!

MERTIE. *(R.C.)* Good heavens! Bert Connelly! Buying a house *at all* is bad enough—but getting it on Euclid Avenue is worse still!

LAURA. Now, why is it?

MERTIE. That's the swellest part of town, isn't it?

BERT. Sure it is, but there's nothing too good for Laura, is there?

MERTIE. *(Crossing to* C.*, below table)* You're buying one, did you say?

BERT. That's what I said. I'm buying one.

MERTIE. What with?

BERT. Why, *money*—of course!

MERTIE. Where will *you* get it—find it some place?

BERT. I don't know as that should concern *you* very much.

MERTIE. *(Angry—controlled)* Well, it does concern me! You may be Laura's husband, but she's still my daughter, and I don't want you settling a lot of debts over her head and causing a lot of trouble!

BERT. *(Quiet but firm)* They'll be my debts too, won't they? (LAURA *crosses to extreme* R., *above table* R.)

MERTIE. That's not the point. Buying a house takes money—and that's something you haven't got!

BERT. *(There is a pause.* BERT *looks her straight in the eye and says firmly)* Mrs. Ferguson—sometimes you make me pretty—damn mad!

LAURA. *(Shocked)* Why, Bert!

BERT. *(Crossing to* LAURA R.*)* I'm sorry, Laura, but when I married you it was with the honest intention I'd take care of you—and I'm going to do it. *(To* MERTIE, *who is* L.C.*)* If you'd stop worrying about what's going to happen to Laura, you'd be a lot happier.

MERTIE. I'll stop worrying about what's going to happen to Laura when I know you are able to take care of her.

BERT. *(Quiet, sure, not mean)* I'll take care of her, all right—and without any help, either. *(Turns toward arch* U.R. *Turning back to her, crossing to* C.*)* As a matter of fact, I didn't marry this family—I married Laura—and you're about to lose something you've made a desperate effort to hang on to. You're going to lose your daughter, Mrs. Ferguson—and somehow I can't feel sorry for you.

MERTIE. *(Sure)* Laura isn't going to leave me, Bert Connelly!

BERT. She already has left you. She did that when she married me, and I'm pretty sure she married me because she wanted to!

MERTIE. You mean Laura thought her own home wasn't good enough for her?

BERT. Laura married me because she loved me. What other motive she may have had, she can tell you herself. *(To* LAURA*)* I'm going upstairs to pack, Laura. We're going to leave here tonight. If you've got anything to say to your mother, you can do it now. I'll wait for you upstairs, and help you get your things together. (BERT *exits.* LAURA *is about to follow when she changes her mind, crossing to* C.*)*

LAURA. Mom, surely you didn't think we were going to come in here to live?

MERTIE. I don't see how you can do anything else under the circumstances. Neither one of you have got anything.

LAURA. *(Pleading)* Mom, that's just your conclusion. Bert doesn't tell everything he knows or does. He's really wonderful.

MERTIE. *(*L.C. *on a line with* LAURA*)* You see what kind of a man he is, don't you? He's trying to turn you against me.

LAURA. He hasn't tried to do that, Mom—you don't understand! What do you think I married Bert for?

MERTIE. If you had listened to me, you wouldn't *be married.*

LAURA. If I had listened to you I wouldn't be anything but just what you want me to be. Bert loves me—and I love him. He brought something into my life I've always wanted—and it has made me happy! I'm going to hang onto it, Mom—even if it means giving up—you!

MERTIE. You're going away with him?

LAURA. Yes.

MERTIE. And you're not coming back here—any more?

LAURA. It doesn't look, now, as if I'd ever want to come back.

MERTIE. Now, Laura, don't talk so silly! I never told you anything that wasn't right or for your own good, Laura.

LAURA. But you never thought what I might want to do was right, either! *(She softens and looks pleadingly at* MERTIE*)* Can't you wish me just a little happiness, now that I *am* married? You think I've done wrong—but I don't! I'm married to the man I love, and I'm going to be happy! *(She crosses to* MERTIE*)* He's going to take me away from you, Mom—— *(*MERTIE *turns to the* L.*)* Oh, I don't want to leave you, Mom, but he wants me to, Mom.

MERTIE. You'll take his word before you'll take mine?

LAURA. But he's my husband, Mom—— *(*MERTIE'S *lips are set. She starts to cross* R. LAURA *watches her. Forgiveness is lost. It is a pathetic cry)* Oh, Mom—don't—— *(*MERTIE *stops. The front door slams.* LAURA *makes a dash for the stairs, choking back a sob.)*

*(*FRED *enters the room.)*

MERTIE. Oh, it's you. I thought it was Tavie.

FRED. *(Hanging up hat, newspaper in pocket)* Hasn't Tavie got home yet?

MERTIE. *(Crossing to window* L.*)* No. She ought to be coming, too.

FRED. If anything has happened, Mertie—we'd hear about it. I've been to the store three times—kept pretty close watch——

MERTIE. Did you see Mr. Haugen?

FRED. No—but Will says he thinks Haugen might be human about this.

MERTIE. Well, don't forget—this Striker fellow is sticking his finger into this, too.

FRED. I know—and maybe he can do more for Tavie than either of us. *(Taking his newspaper)* Where's Laura and Bert?

MERTIE. *(Crossing* U.R. *on a line)* Fred—Bert and Laura are upstairs packing their things. They're going away!

FRED. What?

MERTIE. I tell you, they're leaving.

FRED. *(Crossing to chair* L.C., *laughing)* Well—that's a good one!

MERTIE. What are you laughing about?

FRED. I'm not laughing about anything. I'm laughing at *you*—you were so afraid they were going to stay. *(Sits* L.C. *with newspaper)* Where are they going?

MERTIE. I don't know. Bert just said they were leaving.

FRED. I didn't *think* they'd stay here when they came last night.

MERTIE. What's the matter with them, do you know? I think they've both gone crazy!

FRED. Don't fool yourself, Mertie! They're acting pretty sensible!

MERTIE. What? Walking out of a good place to live when they haven't enough money between them to last a month? Don't talk so foolish. *(Crossing* R. *a little.)*

FRED. *(Watching her)* Mertie, where did you ever get the idea this was a good place to live?

MERTIE. *(Turning on him across the table)* Do you think I'm going to let Laura go out and live in the street, just because she had a lot of romantic ideas in her head and got married? *(Refusing to be sentimental)* You know if she leaves she'll starve to death!

FRED. Well, she'll be happy.

MERTIE. How can she be with a man with a lot of debts? I must say you think a lot of your children!

FRED. Yes, I do—more than you will ever be able to realize.

MERTIE. Then it's time you put your foot down. When they come downstairs I want you to lay down the law. If he don't like it, he can get out. You make it clear to him that Laura is going to stay here until he's able to take care of her. She can get along just as well without him.

FRED. But she won't get along without him—not if I can see a way to prevent it. No girl of mine is going to get along without a man if she loves him.

MERTIE. That's just what she says. That I'm interfering with her happiness. As if a husband with nothing in the world but an automobile and some foolish ideas can bring anybody happiness. I tell you, Fred, you've got to stop them!

FRED. Then they intend to leave tonight?

MERTIE. Yes. It's just like them to go without even their supper.

FRED. Well, Mertie, I'll see what I can do.

MERTIE. All right! But whatever you do, don't beat around the bush. Use a little authority like a man! (MERTIE *exits* D.R.)

FRED. *(Following her to* R.*)* Authority? You never let me have any.

(TAVIE *appears very quietly in the arch. She is nervous, frightened. Her spirit is gone. She moves and talks as if someone might be ready to seize her and take what little life seems to remain in her.)*

FRED. Oh, hello, Tavie. Just get home?

TAVIE. *(Crossing* D.L.C.*)* Yes. Where's Mom?

FRED. *(Crossing above table,* C.*)* In the kitchen.

TAVIE. *(Throwing hat on table* C.*)* You didn't

wait supper for me, did you? *(Sits* L.C.*)* I don't want to eat anything——

FRED. *(Sympathetically)* Come, now, Tavie—you mustn't feel that way about it.

TAVIE. *(Despairingly)* Oh, Pop—I wish I were dead!

FRED. *(Going to her, patting her)* There—there, now. Everything will be all right somehow. You mustn't feel bad. *(Pause)* What did they say to you down there? Did they ask you a lot of questions?

TAVIE. *(Staring into space)* No—they didn't say a thing all day. It was terrible. Every time I looked around I could see some of the clerks staring at me—calling me a thief!

FRED. Why, they don't know anything about it, do they?

TAVIE. *(Rising—crossing to* C. *below table)* I don't know—but it was on my mind all the time. I couldn't stand it—so I went to Mr. Haugen and confessed.

FRED. *(*L.C.*, watching her, quietly)* Tavie, you're a brave girl! I'm proud of you.

TAVIE. *(Turning to him, tears in her eyes)* Oh, Pop—how can you say that?

FRED. *(Taking her in his arms)* Why, you're my girl, Tavie—and I love you. *(There is a pause.* FRED *puts* TAVIE *in chair* L.C. *and takes the chair* L. *of table and sits beside her.)*

TAVIE. I don't know now why I ever did it.

FRED. You mean, tell Mr. Haugen?

TAVIE. No—take the things I did—steal.

FRED. Why, Tavie?

TAVIE. *(Turning—to look into his face)* Oh, Pop, I wanted something so much——

FRED. I know, Tavie—you wanted to be free.

TAVIE. Yes—free from this house—free—from Mom! *(*FRED *drops his head, thinking.)* Oh, for-

give me, Pop, for saying that—but it's the truth! I've been afraid to talk to you about it. I've just hung on—hoping that something would happen—and then I could go away. I'm 'shamed of myself because of you, Pop. You're kind. You must be or you wouldn't understand the way you do. I'm just a worthless, good-for-nothing—a thief! *(She gives way to muffled sobbing.)*

FRED. Hush, Tavie. Your mother will hear you. Now tell me, how did you think stealing would get you your freedom?

TAVIE. Oh, I don't know. I must have been crazy, I guess. All I could think of was getting away, where I wouldn't hear Mom's tongue lashing me all the time. Boys used to come and see me, and want to take me places, but as soon as Mom got to them they were finished. And what she didn't say to them she said to me after they were gone—as if I were going to marry all of them. And then, one day, one did come.

FRED. You mean this fellow, Rupert Striker?

TAVIE. Yes.

FRED. And you liked him.

TAVIE. Yes. I thought if I could marry a man like Rupert, I'd be happy. The first time he took me out I bought that blue dress, you remember, and the hat and coat to match—and I'll never forget what he said—"Tavie, you wear clothes like a million dollars."

FRED. All fellows say things like that to girls, Tavie.

TAVIE. I suppose they do—but when Rupert said it to me it sounded a call to freedom. It rang in my ears—I wanted clothes—clothes and a man like Rupert—and freedom. *(Rising to* L. *Pause. Bitterness comes to her)* Oh, what a fool I was!

FRED. No, Tavie—you mustn't say that.

TAVIE. Mom always called me a fool, but I didn't

know how right she was. I can't marry Rupert now —not after this. And when he finds out why I stole, he won't want me.

FRED. But he does want you, Tavie.

TAVIE. Oh, I know he stood by me last night, but now he's had time to think it over, he'll hate me—he will, for the four-flusher I've turned out to be.

FRED. Tavie, you don't believe everything Rupert tells you, do you?

TAVIE. *(Surprised)* Why, of course I do! Why shouldn't I?

FRED. He talks pretty big sometimes.

TAVIE. He doesn't talk any bigger than he is, Pop.

FRED. Do you think he's as important as he thinks he is?

TAVIE. *Why,* of course he is! He's going to be a big man some day, Pop.

FRED. How do you know?

TAVIE. He says so!

FRED. (TAVIE'S *faith is too much. He takes her in his arms)* Tavie—God bless you—you do love him, don't you?

TAVIE. Yes, Pop—and now I've lost him—the only real chance I ever had. *(Crossing* C. *above table)* Somehow I—I feel a hundred years old!

FRED. What did Mr. Haugen say when you confessed to him?

TAVIE. *(Fear again)* I can't remember. I was half crazy—but he sent me home and said he would talk with me in the morning. *(A brave effort to pull herself together)* But I won't be afraid of that—I wish it were morning now! It's tonight—with Mom!

FRED. Did you see Rupert today?

TAVIE. No.

FRED. He's coming over tonight, isn't he?

*(*TAVIE *is afraid to face her mother. During her next*

speech she is slightly hysterical, taking her hat from the table and going up to the arch U.L.*)*

TAVIE. I don't know, Pop—I don't know anything—I don't want to even think about it——!

FRED. *(Replacing chair, calling after her)* Tavie, where are you going? *(Crossing up to her.)*

TAVIE. *(To him)* I'm going away!

FRED. No, Tavie—I won't let you go—and you mustn't be afraid. I'll take care of your mother, too.

MERTIE. *(Entering and hearing)* What are you talking about? *(Crossing* U.R.*)* Tavie, what happened down there?

FRED. *(Crossing to* C.*)* Nothing happened. And you needn't ask her any questions, because she's not going to answer you.

MERTIE. *(Dismayed)* Well! When did you decide you were the head of this house?

FRED. You told me to show my authority, didn't you? Well, I'm doing it.

MERTIE. Don't think I'm going to listen to you, even if you are.

FRED. Mertie—Tavie's been through a lot of torture during the last twenty-four hours—and she can't stand much more.

MERTIE. She can answer her own mother, can't she?

FRED. No, because I'm not going to let her.

(The doorbell rings.)

MERTIE. Who's that?

FRED. Maybe it's Rupert—and if it is, I want you to be decent to him for Tavie's sake.

TAVIE. Pop, I can't see him.

FRED. Yes, you can—and you will, after a while. Go into the kitchen and get hold of yourself. Try not to cry any more. (TAVIE *exits* D.R. MERTIE

starts for door.) Just a minute, Mertie—I'll answer the door myself. *(Exits* U.L.*)*

RUPERT. *(Entering to* C.*)* Hello, Pop—how's the head of the plantation tonight? I'm a little early, eh? Had your supper yet? Don't let me interrupt if the feedbag is waiting. And *don't* ask me to eat! I've got the groceries all under the belt for this evening. How are you, Mrs. F.?

MERTIE. Huh!

RUPERT. What's the matter? Didn't you sleep well last night?

MERTIE. Be careful what you say, young man—remember you're in my house!

RUPERT. I'll remember, Mother—I'll remember A little control now. Where's Tavie?

MERTIE. It's none of your business.

RUPERT. Haven't you seen her tonight?

MERTIE. Of course we have.

RUPERT. *(*D.L.C.*)* Well, didn't she spring the good news on you? Come through with the shakedown I pulled on them down there?

FRED. *(*L.*)* No, Rupert, we haven't heard a thing.

RUPERT. Those people must be awfully close-mouthed. Why, I made a little history for that firm today, if you ask me. Where is Tavie, anyhow?

MERTIE. Wherever she is, she doesn't want to see you.

RUPERT. *(*C., *below table)* Ah, ah, ah, ah—be yourself, Mrs. F.—be yourself. Listen to youth. This little old sweetheart didn't come rambling all the way over here for nothing. Better trot her out before I pull one of those muscular search warrants on you.

MERTIE. She doesn't want to see you, I tell you.

(TAVIE *appears at the door* D.R.*)*

RUPERT. Ah, there you are, Sweetheart——

MERTIE. *(To* TAVIE*)* Tavie—you keep out of here!

RUPERT. Just a minute, Mrs. F. Come over here, Tavie—that is if you can detour the cyclone. I've got a little surprise for you.

TAVIE. *(Crossing* L.C. *to him)* Did you see Mr. Haugen, Rupert?

RUPERT. Did I see him, Sweetheart—— Say—and what I said to him!

TAVIE. What have you done, Rupert?

RUPERT. What? Didn't they tell you? Well, now, *you* listen to me—you and I are going to get married!

MERTIE. Married?

RUPERT. Yes, ma'am—right away—tonight!

TAVIE. Oh, no, Rupert——

RUPERT. Now, Tavie——

MERTIE. Give her a chance to talk, will you? She's trying to tell you she doesn't want you.

RUPERT. Applesauce! She told me *once* she *did!*

MERTIE. Yes, but she's changed her mind.

RUPERT. *(Crossing* C. *to* MERTIE*)* Say, listen—I don't make it a business to do things for people who tell me one thing and then change their minds on me. I said Tavie was going to marry me tonight! You told me I was responsible for what she did, didn't you? (TAVIE *to* FRED L.*)*

MERTIE. And you are!

RUPERT. Well, I told you I was going to get her out of it, didn't I?

MERTIE. Yes.

RUPERT. Well, I have!

MERTIE. How?

RUPERT. By getting her to marry me right away. That man Haugen is a regular fellow when you get next to him. I simply slipped him the good news about me and Tavie being in love—and he said to me, "Mr. Striker——"

MERTIE. Mr. Striker!

RUPERT. That's what he said, and there wasn't any soft pedal on it, either. "Mr. Striker," says he, "if you'll marry Tavie and get her out of that damn family she's living with, she'll make a good little wife and she'll be happy." "Right," says I—and there you are. *(Crossing to* TAVIE, L.C.*)* Now, Tavie, what do you say?

TAVIE. Rupert dear, you don't understand—I can't marry you now.

RUPERT. You've got to—I promised Mr. Haugen you would!

TAVIE. I can't, Rupert—you don't understand. I love you, dear—but I can't marry you. Why, I stole those dresses to make you love me——

RUPERT. What?

TAVIE. *(Ready to cry)* I did, Rupert—I thought clothes would make me attractive—and you'd want me.

RUPERT. I want you anyway, Tavie. Just because you made a mistake for my sake isn't your fault. How could you know that they wouldn't make any difference with me? I do like you in pretty clothes, but you didn't need them to catch me, Tavie—no, sir—*you* could have won me in a bathing suit!

TAVIE. Oh, Rupert—then it doesn't make any difference at all?

RUPERT. You did it for me, Sweetheart! Of course it does put us back a little—but we'll pay that off. Where's Bert?

FRED. He's upstairs, Rupert.

RUPERT. *(Crossing to stair door)* Oh, Bert!

BERT. *(Offstage)* Yes.

RUPERT. Come on down here. I want to see you. *(To* C., *back of table)* Tavie, kiss your mother good-bye for both of us and ask her to wish us luck—I'm too busy!

BERT. *(Entering, to* RUPERT*)* What is it, Rupert?

RUPERT. How much for the galloping gondola?

BERT. For what?

RUPERT. The benzine chariot—you know—the honeymoon special!

BERT. Oh, the automobile. Do you want to buy it?

RUPERT. *(Taking out a roll of money)* Sure! How much—quick, before I change my mind.

BERT. Well, I hadn't thought——

RUPERT. What's the matter? Can't you think on your feet? Sit down, then!

BERT. I've got a price—three hundred dollars!

RUPERT. There you are—just the amount—all wrapped up and *another* soul made happy. Are you ready, Tavie? *(*BERT *to dining room arch.)*

MERTIE. You two kids are going to regret this. Where do you think you're going to live when you get back?

RUPERT. Give us a chance—we haven't thought where we're going to live when we start yet.

FRED. *(Crossing to* RUPERT C.*)* Well, Rupert—good luck and God bless you. *(To* TAVIE—*kissing her)* Tavie!

RUPERT. *(Seeing* FRED *kiss* TAVIE*)* Well, Mom—you're next! You'd better give her the farewell hug! *(Crossing to her)* You know I hate to leave your house like this—because I want you to like me, Mom. Of course I know you don't, now—but I *would* like to have you kiss Tavie. You know it's the long road for her—and it would be nice if she could start it halfway right at least.

MERTIE. Rupert, I wish you could see just how big a fool you really are!

RUPERT. Then you won't wish us luck? Not even Tavie?

FRED. Mertie, don't send her away without wishing her happiness! Maybe you'll want to see her again—some day.

MERTIE. There'll never be a day but I'll remember she defied me.

TAVIE. *(Her heart broken, sticking to her purpose)* And every day I'll remember you don't love me——

MERTIE. *(It is a sudden, defiant cry to the accusation hurled in her face—for she does love* TAVIE*)* Tavie!

TAVIE. *(Crossing to* MERTIE, R.C.*)* Forgive me, Mom—I'm going to be happy, don't you see? I love Rupert—and I'm going to be happy—— *(She reaches and kisses her mother.* MERTIE *takes her in her arms, smothering her for a moment, saying nothing. There is a pause.* TAVIE *turns)* Come, Rupert—— *(She crosses to the arch* U.L.*)*

RUPERT. So long, Bert. Good-bye, Pop.

FRED. Good-bye, Rupert—I'll shake a man's hand any time!

RUPERT. *(Shaking) Thanks—I never felt so much like living up to it! (To the arch and turning back)* And, Pop—don't get discouraged—when we get back I'll bet a dollar she'll want us to come right in here and live with you! (FRED *laughs.* RUPERT *and* TAVIE *exit.)*

MERTIE. Fred Ferguson, if you think that's funny, you're a fool! *(Exiting to kitchen* D.R.*)*

FRED. Oh, *I'm* the fool of the family now, am I?

LAURA. *(Entering from stairs)* Are you ready, Bert?

BERT. *(Getting hat in* U.L. *arch)* All ready.

LAURA. Where are we going?

BERT. I guess we'll stop at the Claremont.

LAURA. Is that expensive?

BERT. *(Showing* RUPERT'S *money)* We can stand it for a few days, all right.

LAURA. I suppose you know we are leaving, Pop.

FRED. Yes, your mother told me.

LAURA. Where is Mom?

FRED. In the kitchen.

(Pause. LAURA *crosses to door* D.R., *hesitates.* FRED *crosses* C. *above table.)*

LAURA. Oh, what's the use? There's no need of saying good-bye to her. *(Crossing to* FRED C., *above table)* Do you think, Pop, she'll ever forgive me?

FRED. I guess she will—some day—when she finds the apron-strings are really broken. It isn't her heart that's really hard, Laura—it's only her ideas. And when you're in your own home—and she begins to see happiness growing up around you—she'll want to share it with you.

LAURA. Oh, Pop—you know I do love you, don't you?

FRED. *(Comforting her)* Of course I do—and you love your mother, too—only she makes it so hard for you to show it.

LAURA. Yes, Pop—I suppose I do care for her—enough, anyway, so I hate to go without saying good-bye——

FRED. I'll say it for you after you've gone.

LAURA. All right. Good-bye, Pop, dear—— *(Kissing him.)*

FRED. Good-bye, my girl—and good luck—— (LAURA *crosses to arch* U.L.) Now, Bert, I'm depending on you—and I never had more confidence in anyone.

BERT. I'll take care of her—and don't you worry. Come, Laura—— *(They exit.* FRED *goes to window and watches them go.)*

FRED. Well, they've found their wings,—and I know they're going to enjoy flying with them!

MERTIE. *(Enters* D.R.) What are you muttering about?

FRED. I'm not muttering, Mertie, I'm smiling.

MERTIE. *(Crossing to stair door)* I wish I could find something to smile about.

FRED. Maybe you will—some day!

MERTIE. Laura—Laura!

FRED. What do you want her for?

MERTIE. I want her and that man of hers to come to supper.

FRED. Mertie—they've gone!

MERTIE. *(Crossing* D.R.*)* What? You mean they've left? Without even telling me?

FRED. Yes.

MERTIE. What's come over this family, Fred?

FRED. Our children are being reborn, Mertie. They're going into their own world—and they're going to live it in their own way!

MERTIE. Heaven knows I did my best to keep them here.

FRED. You did your best, all right—but you failed to realize that some day your children would grow up.

MERTIE. They'll never grow up to me—they'll always be just children. They're full of ideas about romance and love——

FRED. I think we were, too, at one time, Mertie.

MERTIE. I suppose so—but I wanted to save them from all those disappointments if I could—— *(Door-bell rings.)* Hm! I wonder who that is? (FRED *exits.* MERTIE *stands* R.C.*)*

FLEMMING. *(Offstage)* My God, Ferguson, do you know what's happened? *(Entering* U.L. *to* C.*)* Joe and Mary have run away!

FRED. *(*D.L.C.*)* What, another?

FLEMMING. Yes, and they're married!

FRED. Married?

MERTIE. Good heavens—will this never end? Why didn't somebody stop them?

FLEMMING. I didn't know anything about it until tonight. I found this note when I got home.

MERTIE. *(Taking it)* "Joe and I were married this afternoon. We're on our way to Niagara Falls."

FLEMMING. *(Storming)* This is a hell of a thing

to happen! How are they going to live? Who's going to support her?

MERTIE. *(An indignant look)* Why, Joe is, of course!

FLEMMING. How can he? Has he got any money? Has he got a job? Has he got any future? *(Crossing to* FRED, *who is* L.*)* Where does he think he's going to live? Hell's bells, I thought it was all right to court her, because he's a darn nice fellow—but I thought I'd know something about it before it happened. Kids ought to be told of the consequences of marriage—then they wouldn't be so anxious to jump into it! *(During this speech* MERTIE *goes into dining room.)*

FRED. Now listen, Bill—it's got to happen some time, hasn't it? You said so yourself last night.

FLEMMING. Yes, I know, but——

FRED. Joe is a good boy—and you like him, don't you?

FLEMMING. Of course I like him, but——

FRED. And you said it was kind of nice to have a boy like Joe around the house.

FLEMMING. I know, Fred——

FRED. Well, then, if Joe can't support her—they can move right in with you.

FLEMMING. *(Roaring)* Hell's bells—that's what I'm getting *at!* I won't have them!

FRED. *(Taking newspaper from pocket)* Now, listen, Bill—I guess you haven't read the paper.

FLEMMING. What's in it?

FRED. *(Pointing)* Here—read that!

FLEMMING. "Joseph Ferguson awarded fifteen hundred dollars. Plans submitted by local young man selected for new memorial bridge." He didn't win that, did he?

FRED. Ain't that what it says there?

FLEMMING. *(Smiling)* Well, what do you think

of that? I always said that boy had stuff in him. Didn't I say so last night?

FRED. You certainly did, Bill.

FLEMMING. *(Slapping newspaper)* Why, this means he's *made*, doesn't it?

FRED. Well, it ought to mean a pretty good start. You're not going to worry about Mary, are you?

FLEMMING. Not much! And even if they do get pinched in the beginning, it's a darn poor parent who can't give 'em a little lift, eh? Put on your hat, Fred—I'll take you out and buy you a cigar. *(Throwing paper on table* C., *crossing* U.L.*)*

FRED. I guess I ought to buy the cigars, Bill! *(Following.)*

FLEMMING. What do you think I ought to get 'em for a wedding present?

FRED. I don't know—I guess they'd be glad to have most anything!

FLEMMING. I don't suppose they'd kick much if I bought 'em an automobile.

MERTIE. *(*R.C.*)* Oh, my God!

FLEMMING. Well, good night, Mrs. Ferguson—if you hear any more about them, let me know, won't you?

MERTIE. All right, Will. Good night.

(As the two men are about to go off, arm in arm, laughing, MERTIE *stands thinking, lonesome and lost.* FRED, *standing in the vestibule with* FLEMMING, *looks back and notices that* MERTIE *is hurt and terribly alone. He motions to* FLEMMING *to leave and that he will follow him.* FLEMMING *understands and exits. The slam of the front door makes* MERTIE *think that* FRED *has already left, but he watches from the vestibule, unnoticed. The house has suddenly become very quiet. She takes a few steps into the room up* R., *thinking. She sees the newspaper on the*

table and picks it up, reading the article to herself. Suddenly she looks far off, wondering. The newspaper slips from her hands. There is a candy box on the table and she picks it up. It seems to hold some fascination for her as she carries it to the sideboard and puts it down. She wanders about the room, crossing to the window left. She pulls the shade all the way down and stands silently, hoping to hear some sound of life in the house. Her direction takes her to JOE'S *desk. She picks up the blue prints and gazes into the maze of lines, dropping them unconsciously on the table. Her eyes are wide with despair. A flash of the future is on her face as she crosses to* C., *above table. She is in a far-away world as* FRED *quietly steals up behind her and lays his hand on her shoulder. She starts.)*

MERTIE. *(Startled—then broken)* Fred——

FRED. *(A look of understanding between them as he pats her shoulder tenderly)* Everything will turn out all right. There will be grandchildren, Mertie.

MERTIE. *(A soft light breaks over her face—she repeats wistfully after him)* Grandchildren.

CURTAIN

PROPS

ACT I

In Living Room

1 large rug or carpet.
3 small rugs.
1 mantel U.C.
1 library table C.
1 large work table L.
3 small straight back chairs.
1 sewing cabinet R.C.
1 low rocker, R.C.
1 morris chair, L.C.
1 sideboard, U.R.
1 hall tree in hall U.L.
1 telephone stand—small.
1 sewing basket with fixtures.
6 pair of stockings.
6 pair of socks.
Laundry on sideboard, including sheets, pillow cases, towels, etc.
Old-fashioned clock on mantel.
Candle sticks on mantel.
Tobacco jar on mantel.
Pipes and pipe-holder on mantel.
Ashtray.
Several candy boxes on sideboard.
1 candy box, empty, on table C.

Several magazines on table C.
Books.
Drawing instruments on table L.
Drawing-board.
Paper.
Several blue prints flat on table.
Books on table L.
Waste basket D.L.
Cushions in window seat.
1 telephone on stand.
1 telephone stand R. of mantel.
Drapes on windows and arches.
Cover for sideboard.
Dishes on sideboard to decorate.
1 finger-nail buffer on sideboard.
2 handkerchiefs in sideboard drawer.
1 library tablecover.

In Dining Room

1 large table.
4 straight chairs.
1 china cabinet.
Dishes to decorate.
Drapes for window.
Cover for dining-room table.
1 suit or dress box for Mertie.
2 dresses.
2 suitcases for Bert.
1 cigar for Bert.
1 special delivery letter.
1 check in letter.

Offstage

1 book for Joe to carry on.
1 box of candy for Rupert.
1 newspaper for Fred.

1 can tobacco for Fred.
2 suitcases for Bert.
1 suitcase for Joe.
1 newspaper for Fred.
1 shipping basket, groceries for Laura.
1 note for Flemming.

ELECTRICAL PLOT

ACT I

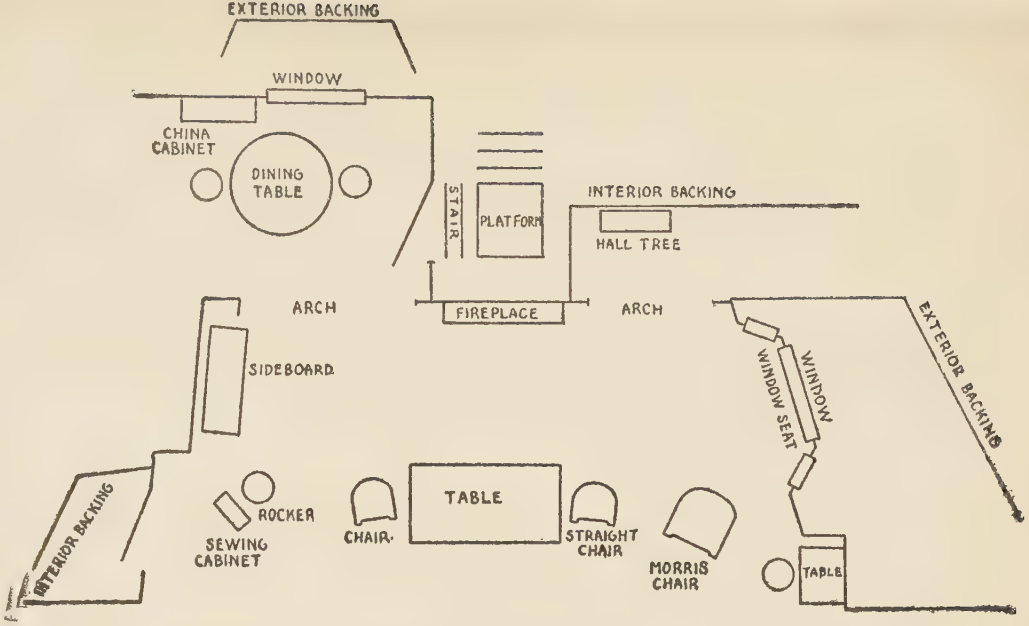
Amber, blue, and white in foots and borders.
Chandelier center over table.
Blue floods on windows U.L. and U.R.C.
Bracket lights D.R. and over mantel.
Bracket light D.L. over desk.
Bracket light in dining room R. of window.
Bracket light in hall L. of rack.
Table light on sideboard.

ACT II

All up as in Act I except bracket light D.L.
Bracket light in hall pulls out on chain at end of Scene I.
Brackets over mantel and D.R. and chandelier go out on push button L. of arch U.L.
Bracket light in dining room pulls out on chain.
When table light on sideboard is on—Spot in border floods Mertie's chair D.R.
Bracket over desk D.L. pulls on as Joe lights it in Scene II.
Bring up spot in border to flood table and morris chair.

ACT III

All brackets and chandelier out.
Amber floods on window.



SCENE DESIGN

"THAT FERGUSON FAMILY"